THE WIRE

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ar kane

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lo-fi network

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strange angel

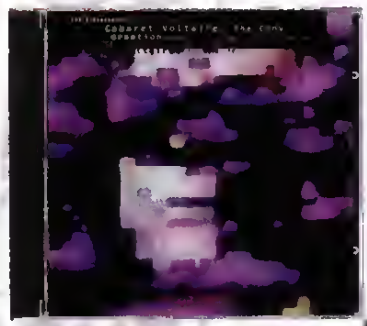
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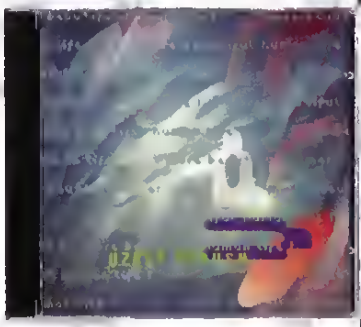
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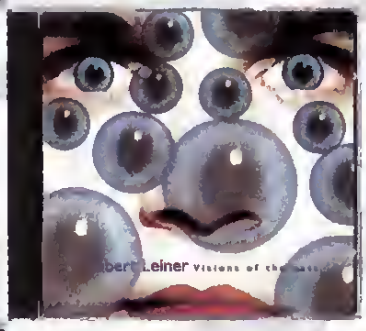


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Debut album of Danish duo Tommy Gee and Thomas "Totor" Lynge. Inspired by Japanese culture and religion throughout the world, "Kokotsu" peints e colourful picture of the band's abilities in the field of abstract dance.



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Collaboration between Geir Jenssen (Biosphere) and Pete Namlook (Fax +49-69/450464). A peculiar blend of talents, this magnifent magnum opus is at times a soothing, at times a haunting listening expenence.



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A first overview of the Apollo works featuring tracks by Golden Girls, Model 500, David Morley, Biosphere, Aphex Twin, Atlantis, Electrotête, Love Craft & Neuro. A second volume is set for release in the autumn.

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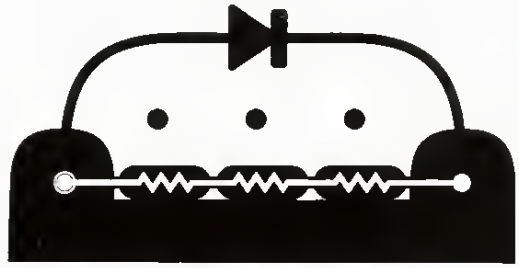
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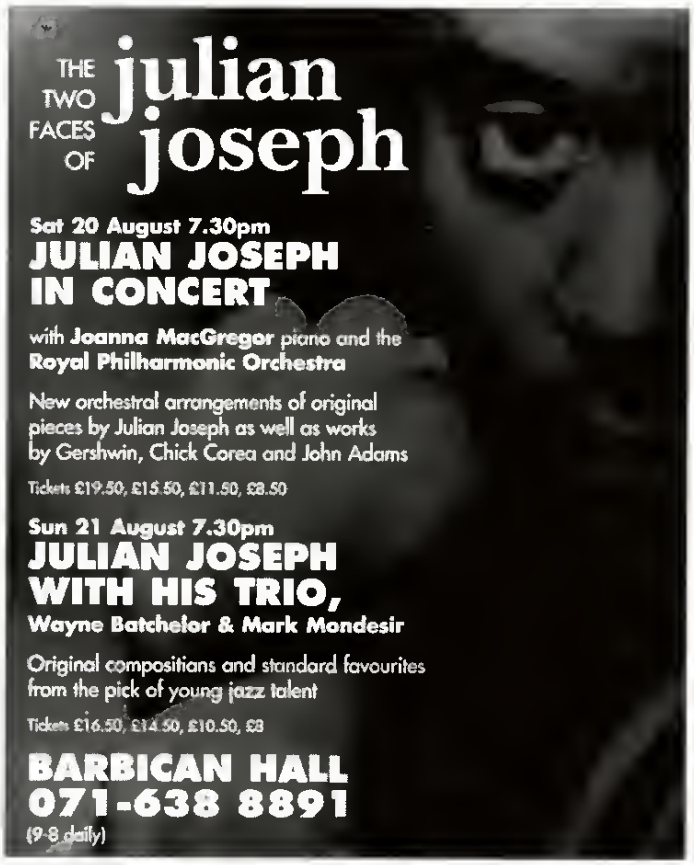
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sounding off

News, live events, happenings. . .

Compiled by
Rob Young

News items should reach us by Thursday 4 August for inclusion in the September issue



Now You See It. . . is a ten day event (3–12 August) at London's South Bank Centre featuring unconventional commissions, one-off appearances and unusual collaborations. Arto Lindsay accompanies Amanda Miller's Pretty Ugly Dance Company (3), and joins the Brazilian tropicalismo star Caetano Veloso for an evening entitled *Strong Roots And Sensitive Aerials* (4), new choreography by New York's Molissa Fenley is set to music by Arvo Part and Laurie Anderson (5), Ken Campbell (pictured) performs *Knocked Sideways* (6), influential soul singer Jimmy Scott, who appeared on Lou Reed's last album, plays two nights (5–6), earplugs in for Rhys Chatham and his orchestra of 101 guitarists (8–9), Andy Summers appears with The Pan African Orchestra and Oren Marshall Trio (10), boho balladeering from South London's Tiger Lilies (10), a Luaka Bop showcase with Geggy Tah, Shoukichi Kina & Champloose and others introduced by David Byrne (11), and a concert version of Mike Westbrook's opera *Coming Through Slaughter*, based on the novel by Michael Ondaatje (12). In addition, should all this activity fill you with the desire to communicate with the world, the foyer of the Queen Elizabeth Hall will become an e-City Cafe, with terminals allowing you to Internetwork to your heart's content. Or simply observe the nerds at play from one of 101 chairs, each customised by a different artist. Ticket prices and information from the South Bank on 071 928 8800.

The Chill Out label is staging a free outdoor Highland Gala in "a village overlooking the Isle Of Skye" (that's all they're saying) between 12–14 August. There'll be a big top on the beach containing performances from Zion Train, GesCom (aka Autechre), Pressure Of Speech, Slowly, Camberwell Butterflies and Elvis Beetle, with more acts to be confirmed. DJs include Telepathic Fish, Cyclorama, The Big Chill, Tony Morley, Chill Out Sound System and Global Communication, and Max Eastley will be installing sound sculptures along the beach. There are limited invites available to the public — if you like the sound of circus acts, psychedelic bagpipes at dawn, dub, electronic improvisation, jazz, fiddles and campfires on the beach, call 071 737 5301.

Quirky at South London's Vox Club (Fridays 10 pm–6 am) continues to celebrate the new electronic avant garde with a series of unusual collaborations and sound clashes. The Orb's Alex Paterson and old Yes man Steve Hillage jam for four hours on 29 July, then on 5 August there's a play-off between Paul Schutze and those merry pranksters of the cellnet, Scanner (see page 24 for one's opinion of the other). Slated but not confirmed for the rest of the month are sets by God's Kevin Martin and Bark Psychosis's Graham Sutton. Rising High signings Ubik, Buddha's Ear, an

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sounding off

Inter-Modo act featuring ex-members of Terminal Cheesecake, Technova with On-U Sound man David Harrow, and a possible appearance by Seefeel before they head Stateside. You have nothing to lose but your money. £5 conc, £4 members, while normal people have to pay £4 before 11 pm, £6 after. Quirky hotline 071 737 2095.

Final Frontier (Fridays at United Kingdom, South West London, DB1 877 0110) offers another take on European Electronica: the venue has a Lunar Room, a Mother Earth Room and an Infinity Room, all bubbling away to the sound of DJ sets by Dave Angel, Rephlex Records' Kosmik Kommando, Justin Robertson, Alex Paterson, The Three Musketeers (5 August), Robert Leiner, Paul Van Dyk, Tokyo Sex Whale (12), and Juno Reactor, Rad Rice, Sugarlump (19). Admission for members is £7 before 11.30 pm/£9 after, non members £9/£11. There's a free Space Shuttle bus to and from the club, departing from Trafalgar Square at 9 pm, 10.30 pm and midnight.



The Electronic Lounge, meanwhile, is the place to wind down and discuss events such as those mentioned immediately above. August's meeting at the ICA Bar in London is on 2 August, and cushioning the hubbub with a gentle sonic wash will be Mixmaster Morris and Daniel Pemberton. September's Lounge (6) coincides with the release of Virgin's *Isolationism* CD, with DJ sets from Scorn and Lull, and possibly the first screening of a new *Trance Europe Express* film. Costs just £1.50 to get in (the price of an ICA day pass). Further info from Robin on 071 498 3D32.

Rudolph Grey, the New York guitar abuser (profiled in this month's Bites section), appears at Blast First's Disobey Club (28 July) with a Blue Humans band comprising Tom Surgal on bass and, surprisingly, Charles Gayle on drums. Support is from Ether Hogg, led by a ranting Edwin Pouncey/Savage Pencil (and that masked man on trombone is none other than onetime honcho of this very organ, RD Cook). Put Put also play, and as usual Beekeeper/Bruce Gilbert will be fumigating tha house with an assortment of top quality waxings. August's Disobey gathering happens on 1 September, just to confuse you. In another unlikely match of artistes, John Oswald will perform his plunderphonics, and George 'Magritte was my best mate' Melly will read poetry. Disobey is at The Garage in North London, entry is £6, and the number for all Disobey related enquiries is 071 278 2D94. There are now three highly collectable pieces of exclusive merchandise available (only through the pages of *The Wire*): the Charles Gayle *Live At Disobey* CD, a Sun Ra video pack and *The Young Person's Guide To Phill Niblock* double CD. To obtain them, turn to page 46.



The BBC Proms this year (at London's Royal Albert Hall, 071 589 8212) celebrates 100 years since its foundation. Most concerts in the series are reconstructions of legendary moments in the history of the Proms, but next year they hope to swing the other way and focus on contemporary music. There's still a good helping of 20th century music this year though, and the *Proms Guide* (sold in most music/bookshops) contains special discount vouchers for selected contemporary music Proms. Highlights to watch for: Giles Swayne's 28-voice *Cry* (5 August), Gerhard, Boulez and Benjamin (7), Maxwell Davies's *Symphony No 5* (9), late night Indian music (12), Tavener's *The Apocalypse* (14), Birtwistle's *Earth Dances* (27), Lutoslawski's *Symphony No 4* (30), Hugh Wood's *Cello Concerto* (31), Ives, Holt, Xenakis and Kurtág (1 September), and Berg, Schoenberg and Boulez (5). All concerts are broadcast live on BBC Radio Three.

Reading Festival this year happens over August Bank Holiday weekend (26-28), with the usual helping of staple rock fare fleshed out with acts such as Cypress Hill, Pavement, Trans-Global Underground, Sebadoh, Primal Scream, Fun-Da-Mental, Pulp, Luscious Jackson, Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rollins Band, American Music Club, Boredoms, Morphine and Jeff Buckley. A three day ticket is £55, which includes camping and car parking. It's in a field off Richfield Avenue, booking is from many local record retailers and agents, and there's an info line on 071 284 4111.

Julian Joseph gives two concerts in London's Barbican Hall on 20 and 21 August, to display two different strands of his pianism. On the first night he duets with the classical pianist Joanna MacGregor with the Royal Philharmonic Concert Orchestra, playing original pieces, and works by Gershwin, Chick Corea and John Adams, on the second he joins up with his Trio, backed by an All-Star Big Band. Tickets are between £8 and £19.50, phone 071 638 8891 for booking information.

Jazz Rumours at the Vortex in North London (Sundays, 071 254 6516) has the following whipping up a storm this month: Elton Dean, Paul Rutherford, Mark Sanders and Marcio Mattos (7), The Harry Beckett Quartet (14), Trevor Watts's Moire Music Trio (21), and The Tony Marsh Quartet (28). Entry is £4/£3.

Woodstock is being recreated 25 years after the original festival of joy and light (or long weekend's journey into bad acid, depending on which way you look at it) The line-up so far includes Aerosmith, Arrested Development, Johnny Cash, Jimmy Cliff, Joe Cocker (with a little help from his friends), The Cranberries, Crosby Stills & Nash, Cypress Hill, Bob Dylan, Peter Gabriel, Porno For Pyros, Nine Inch Nails, Red Hot Chili Peppers, Rollins Band and Santana It's taking place on 13 & 14 August in Saugerties, New York, an 840 acre area that's also the site of an Eco-Village (ticket sales are geared towards shared transit and car pooling) Anyone interested in finding out whether there's still such a thing as US counterculture should phone Arthur Sheriff on 081 874 0985 for ticket information

The Watermans Arts Centre in Brentford (081 568 1176) closes for two weeks (16-30 August) but before then you can see Tomorrow's Warriors, a group drawn from the Jazz Warriors/Nu Troop cadre (6), Salsa Y Ache (13), and Sohni Mahiwal (11-14), an epic recreation of a Punjabi love story The Thameside location of the venue is to be turned into a seething mass of creativity involving Gary Crosby, Keith Waithe, sculptor Paul Burwell, and dance and drama featuring the Punjabi Theatre Academy Tickets are £7 40/£5 50 concs/£4 50 under 18s

Hull Jazz Festival takes place at venues around the city's Marina between 2-7 August, kicking off with a John Coltrane Tribute by Steve Williamson/Julian Joseph/Mark Mondesir/Gary Crosby (2), and continuing with appearances by John Etheridge (3), Emperor's New Clothes (4), Martin Taylor (5), Andy Sheppard (6), Elaine Delmar (7) and the amusingly monikered local trumpeter Erogenous Jones (7) A full brochure with booking information is available from Hull Tourist Information on 0482 223559

Herman Leonard's quintessential jazz photographs are exhibited from 3 August at the Special Photographers Company in West London (071 221 3849) Leonard's photos feature largely in an anthology, *Jazz — A Photographic Documentary*, selected by Richard Williams and published by Studio Editions on 14 September There's another musical exhibition, *The Look Of The Sound*, at the Museum And Art Gallery in Hove (30 July-4 September, 0273 779410) It includes Henri Matisse's *Jazz* prints, jazz painting and drawing by Brian Busfield, and graphic scores by Stockhausen, Cage and others Accompanying the exhibition, there'll be live music on the Museum lawns, and jazz workshops for children and adults

Cologne's Popkomm 94, a music industry trade fair catering for

the office ambience

Melodica — Blackalicious (Mo Wax)
FFWD — FFWD (Inter-Modo)
The Sporting Life — Diamanda Galas/John Paul Jones (Mute)
Extended Play — The Raincoats (Blast First)
Iso — Ismael Lo (Mango)
Trouble Man — Marvin Gaye (Motown)
Alphabet City — Gerard Malanga, Elliot Sharp, etc (Sub Rosa)
The Breeze Was Mellow As The Guns Cooled In The Cellar — Up, Bustle & Out (Ninja Tune)
Buckshot Le Fonque — Branford Marsalis (Columbia)
Autogeddon — Julian Cope

Compiled by *The Wire* sound system

Mr Bell Considers



There's no peace for the wicked, especially on Bank Holiday weekend Today I have a gig on Pleasure Island The word has gone out that someone needs some Japanese flute playing in the Liverpool docklands, so we are motoring north through the blustery holiday rain Pleasure Island is a mega-leisure-complex-park thingy, a division of Tomorrow's Leisure Plc My nine year old son and I enter with trepidation, because we know that Pleasure Island is that terrifying place in *Pinocchio* where innocent boys play pool and turn into donkeys

Here they have a "Strike Zone" (that's bowling alley to you), a Rollerdome, a Quasar laser gun battle, and the world's biggest indoor adventure play structure Oh, and the cafe is called Megabites The noise level is almost unbelievable Above the rumbling rollerskates and deafening disco rise the screams of 1500 funlovers, and staff announcements "Will Barry come to Reception?"

My job to find the Party Room Here they are holding a three-day festival of Japanese arts Music, kimono, tea ceremony, Bonsai trees, and Bavarian dancing (no one knows why) The Party Room is next to Megabites, and far from soundproofed The odd scream penetrates, and "Will Barry come to Reception?" is always audible

I watch a demonstration of how to put on a kimono You need two people, plus a third to give a running commentary Then I play some Japanese tunes Redfaced, gasping people tumble through the swinging doors into the Party Room — straight from the hyperactive bedlam of Pleasure Island into this strange little oasis of Oriental calm

Derek from the Wirral Bonsai Centre is misting his tiny trees He and I are due to perform together Bonsai trimming and Japanese flute I quickly run through the ground rules of improvised performance with Derek "Give me a good clear nod when you've finished" Derek is on the case "I'll just clip away under these branches — it's a bit of a con really" Definition of a professional improvisor someone who's done it for five years without being found out

There's supposed to be a Kendo workout in the Rollerdome — you know Kendo you put on a medieval mask, pick up a split bamboo sword, and scream as you try to cleave your opponent's skull neatly in half But the opponent hasn't turned up, and of course it takes two to Kendo

Later I accompany a tea ceremony Agonisingly slow, ritualistic, full of obscure gestures — it's a little like cricket A few local teenagers are invited to join in the ceremony, egged on by their spluttering, jostling companions They kneel down uncomfortably to share the frothy green liquid I can't help thinking of Captain Cook taking tea with his naval officers on some tropical beach, while dangerous savages hover about.

A few yards away in Megabites, parents lovingly Camcorder their children hurling chips at each other But in the meditative Japanese environment of the Party Room we feel we may have got a little closer to the answer to the eternal question "Will Barry come to Reception?"

CLIVE BELL

9500 visitors which also brings in over 250 local and international artists to perform, takes place between 18-21 August in Congress Centre East, part of the city's KölnMesse complex. A quick survey of featured artists reveals label showcase events from Big Cat (Pavement, Cop Shoot Cop, Heather Nova, Faith Over Reason), KK Records (Psychick Warriors Ov Gaia, Zen Paradox), City Slang (Sebadoh, Palace Brothers), Warp (Seefeel, Autechre, LFO, Aphex Twin) Crammed Discs, Hut, and Sub Pop. Other artists appearing throughout the long weekend include ex-Velvet Mo 'call me Maureen' Tucker, Toto La


Molam Lao

Momposita, SE Rogie, Scorn, Underworld, Zeni Geva, and numerous indigenous German bands and DJs. Phone 010 49 202 278 310 for more details.

UK Future Age Music Festival is a day event at London's Conway Hall (27 August) showcasing various cutting-edge applications of electronics and computers in music making. As well as retail stands and displays of hardware and software, there'll be live performances from ex-Tangerine Dream veteran Steve Schroyder (who's also worked with Ash Ra Tempel), another ex-T Dreamer, Steve Jolliffe, demonstrating his wind synthesizer, festival organiser Mark Jenkins and his MIDI Glove Controller, and more from Merge, Attrition, Marvin Wilson and Optic Eye. Tickets are £7.50 from Future Age Music Express, PO Box 387, London N22 6SF (include SAE, or you can book by credit card on 081 889 0616).

Molam Lao, the Paris based exiles from Laos whose recent Nimbus CD was praised in these pages, have three UK appearances this month. Hastings St Mary In The Castle (25), Morecambe Bay WOMAD Holiday Weekend (27), and London Purcell Room (29). They utilise the khen, a bamboo mouth organ, and sing lam — improvised vocal duels between the men and women, the object being to outwit each other by laying traps in rhyme. Tickets for the London show are £10/£7.50/£5.50 (Box Office 071 928 8800), information from the Asian Music Circuit on 0831 742 9911.

Bude Summer Jazz School, for musicians aged 14-30, is running from 28 August-3 September, with courses on various aspects of improvisation given by expert tutors in the fields of piano, reeds, drums, saxophones and woodwind, acoustic/electric bass, brass and guitar. Still (just) time to apply, by phoning 0392 218368.

G Love & Special Sauce, who release a single "Cold Beverage" on the revamped Okeh R&B label this month, play London HQ Club (11), London Garage (12), London Marquee Cafe (13), Brighton Zap Club (14), and return to London Dublin Castle (15).

The Vale Of Glamorgan Festival 1994 includes notable and rarely heard works by contemporary composers, with six world premieres played during the week-long event (22-28 August). Concerts take place at venues in Cardiff and the Vale. The Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe is resident at the Festival, and The Brodsky Quartet play four of his string quartets (23). There's also a hefty splattering of works by the Polish Henryk Górecki, and others by David Matthews, Howard Skempton, Arvo Part and Ravel. For a brochure and booking information call 0446 794848.

Club Integral (at Havil Hall, South London) hosts our own prodigy, Ben Watson, with Simon Fell, performing their 'musical' rendition


Rova

of parts of Ben's thesis, *Frank Zappa: The Negative Dialectics Of Poodle Play*. Support comes from Gus Garside and Jo Blowers. It's on 31 July, ring 071 732 4624 for details. Ben would like to point out that he *won't* be appearing in the nude.

Free Music XXI is a European Improv festival (5-6 August), a short hop across the Channel at Teater Zuidpool in Antwerp, Belgium. On the Friday are sets from Alan Tomlinson/Dave Tucker/Roger Turner, solo sax from Luc Houtkamp, Fred Van Hove's duo Lust & House, and trumpeter Pino Minafra's Sud Ensemble. Saturday includes Andre Goudbeek's (sax/bandoneon) Trio, solo guitar from Joe Sachse, and a Dorothea Schurch/Hans Schneider duo. 400F for both days, information from 010 323 230 6075.

Resonance, the magazine published by the LMC, has a new summer issue out, with an extract from AMM drummer Eddie Prevost's forthcoming book, John Zorn interviewed by Steve Beresford, Evan Parker on the Ocora World Music label, and stuff on Luigi Russolo, Morton Feldman, Cornelius Cardew's Scratch Orchestra, as well as reviews of books, records and cardboard boxes. Yours for £3 (£4 overseas) from LMC, 2nd Floor, Community Music House, 60 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3BP □

television & radio

Quartet (C4, 7 August, 3pm) Examines the changing nature of music made by groups of four, including Haydn, barbershop, The Drifters, Kronos, The Britten Quartet, The Rova Saxophone Quartet, John Zorn, MJQ and U2.

Opening Shot (C4, Saturdays 6.30 pm) *South Bank Show* Junior series includes a documentary on *Smash Hits* and profiles of "Smokin' Joe" Bonamassa, a 16 year old guitarist recording his first album, and Sergio Salvatore, a 12 year old jazz pianist. Two artists we're unlikely to hear from again.

A3 — Access All Areas (Meridian, Thursdays, 11.35 pm) African Headcharge, 800 Radleys (18), Macka B, Culture (25), Jah Wobble (1 September).

Continuing our search for the furthest out TV/radio programmes, we hear from WMSE Radio (91.7 FM) at Milwaukee School Of Engineering in Midwest USA, whose *Alternating Currents* (Sundays 6-9 pm) regales its listeners with bracing shots of AMM, Henry Threadgill, Jonathan Harvey, Jim O'Rourke, Company, Barry Guy, George Graewe, Bernard Herrman, Maarten Altena, Frank Zappa, Cecil Taylor and Max Roach. Send music and missives to PO Box 644, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201-0644, USA.

letter from malaysia

In one of the world's costliest plots of real estate, a dozen twentysomethings chart the wistful dreams and storylines of their peers.



Singapore skyline

"Punk lives!", "Anarchy in the UK!", "Anger is an energy!" The slogans have been daubed all over the leather jackets and the ripped T-shirts worn loose for sticky tropical heat. Here they are in action, blazoned across the backs and chests of skinheads in braces and 10-hole Doc Martens, slam dancing and stage diving into a pool of more skins, mixing it rough on the dancefloor with assorted tribal teens in a Kuala Lumpur karaoke club. The few club regulars on the balcony winebar overlooking the dark, seething hall stare blankly into the fractured light of a revolving mirror ball.

Did I get off the right flight home? Is this really KL, where I have returned after a protracted period living in Australia? For me, this Sunday afternoon gig acts as a kind of early cultural locator of what might constitute 'home', underlining the frantic mutation of time and place that occurs whenever and wherever Malaysia's pop culture buffet is served.

The promoter is Joe Kidd. He has fond memories of 1978 reading monochrome *NME*s and listing to John Peel on borrowed short wave radios. Nowadays he acts on his hunches and organises shows like this one for Malaysia's burgeoning punk 'community'. And when his and other fanzines sell so well across Malaysia, when their faith in creating Rollins Band- and Napalm Death-inspired music continues to be met by blanket bans on TV and radio, then we must assume that good spirits still navigate this tropical jungle.

Maybe this is home, after all, except that now home is where the music takes us, since too many urban immigrants stake their place in Malaysia's booming economy with their Walkmans firmly plugged in. Bands of all descriptions are sprouting up across the country, making and distributing their own tapes, which then travel from towns to cities in cassette players of all sorts. In KL, new music is heard in the dance halls (such as Baze, Boom Boom Room, DVB, Vibe), the nightmarkets and seldom on the insipid airwaves of local TV and radio. recent radio bans for rap and HipHop have forced promoters like Joe Kidd underground, appropriating the mainstream clubs and pubs of this 'tropical paradise'.

At a fashionable bar called Barn Thai, swigging local beers in between progressively worsening banter, it's easy to come across young, recently exiled British architects and the like. Tonight, Tel from Brighton tells me he's just bought a late model Toyota for the daily commute to his new job downtown, and his girlfriend rang only hours ago to confirm her arrival next week from Manchester. We drink to that as the house band play another pop song we both know from different times, different places.

Acute labour shortages mean more Westerners are calling this region 'home', at least for know. Tel is convinced his new home offers him much better career prospects, a future for his little bit of the UK. He's not interested in anarchy, anyway, here or anywhere else.

Being gobsmacked by visiting Australian jazz groups such as Ten Part Invention, performing in KL's Australian Embassy, just makes moments in this paradise more tasty, more aromatic. The group's take on standards like "Miles Ahead" and "Cantaloupe Island" and the warmth of their own pieces surprises a local doctor in the audience — so that's what Australian jazz sounds like. so funky, so cool! And he thought only the home of jazz — only New York — could provide such verve.

Fast forward to the cool, stark white dancehall deep within the Zouk Club's warehouse arcadia, set on a curve of the Singapore river. Zouk's PR manager Andrew and I swap personal histories of Australia, away from the stifling social and cultural confines that are inevitably constructed for people of colour down-under, both of us have found relief in Singapore and Kuala Lumpur. But where do we belong this afternoon? Home, we decide, could still be inner city Sydney, yet our shared pop culture — bhangra, Balearic, 808 State, MTV, Cantonese breakfasts — means we are home here as well.

Across the river, several subway stops later, a handful of Grunge-y kids pack out the concrete shell of an empty lot in a downtown Singapore shopping mall. They squat politely on the cold, bare floor applauding the groups who play at this two day 'festival'. Across the atrium there are smart jewellers and emporiums of designer clothing. This is cute: in one of the world's costliest plots of real estate, a dozen twentysomethings share their guitars and electronics to chart the wistful dreams and storylines of their peers.

An audience member suggests to me that home seems to make more sense if you locate it near a cyberspace turnpike, whenever he calls in on his Internet mailbox there is always a mess of letters and messages waiting to be answered. At least there's always a possibility of anarchy in cyberspace, a sigh of relief from Singapore's rigid social decorum.

As the aftermath to a recent global sideshow, the infamous canning victim and graffiti offender Michael Fay has gone home to Midwest America. who knows whether the home of smalltown USA will ever replace the cosmopolitan home of Singapore's malls and nightlife he knew so well. **KEAN WONG**




SMIRNOFF
SMIRNOFF
THE OTHER SIDE.

bites



Artist and print maker **Dominic Snyder** is probably best known for the huge, powerful images of (mainly) jazz musicians which provided backdrops for the music events at last year's Edinburgh Festival

Snyder is a saxophonist himself, but he bypasses conventional artistic interpretations of jazz — the tired, outmoded setting of a basement dive seen through a haze of cigarette smoke and chiaroscuro lighting — by employing techniques that draw on a variety of unlikely influences traditional craft-based disciplines such as woodcuts and print making, the exotic homoerotic imagery of photographer Robert Mapplethorpe (his print of a naked, black horn player isn't called *Big Dong* for nothing), as well as making the same kind of connections with so-called 'primitive art' (ie African) that characterised the work of the Cubists

His figures (they also include idyllic, dreamy impressions of 'Sea Drummers' and 'Drummer Girls') are given short, thick set torsos and limbs and deep blue and red hues and seem to be attempting to break out of the cramped physical spaces in which Snyder constrains them An exhibition of Snyder's prints and paintings runs at The Arts Index gallery in Brighton's Marina village from 6 August to 2 September, and there's a preview of the show on 5 August during which Snyder will also give a solo saxophone recital **PUNITA AGA**



Having seen his own ideas on how to manage a pop group immortalised on screen in Julian Temple's *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle*, **Malcolm McLaren** is now planning to do the same for Peter Grant, the notorious ex-manager of Led Zeppelin who turned rock management on its head in the 70s with his legendary brand of persuasion and manipulation

Taking the Led Zep biography *Hammer Of The Gods* as a starting point, the film of the same name will be co-produced by McLaren and directed by Mike Figgis (who spent the late 60s playing alongside Bryan Ferry in the Newcastle group The Gas Board) "I wanted to make a film abut the history of rock 'n' roll," says McLaren, who is once again based in London after a protracted sojourn in LA "I needed a character who had lived through it all and who'd been behind the curtain rather than in front of it." Grant, who began his career booking US acts into the UK and managing The Yardbirds, fitted the bill, and after he and McLaren hooked up, the latter abandoned his original plan of using Brian Epstein's life as the centrepiece of the film

It's a busy time for the man who masterminded the rise (and fall) of The Sex Pistols. his fourth 'solo' album, *Paris*, has just been released and sees him collaborating with actress Catherine Deneuve, chanteuse Francoise Hardy and Tunisian singer Amina It's a further exercise in the now familiar McLaren approach to making music get a decent producer (Robin Millar), think up a neat conceptual tag (linking Miles Davis, Serge Gainsbourg and the Bohemian joys of the French capital), and mix it up with a ragbag of diffuse sounds (jazz, the avant garde influence of pianist Erik Satie, and the melodrama and tradition of chanson) The album lacks the punch of McLaren's early 80s work with producer Trevor Horn there's nothing to equal the innovative snap of "Buffalo Gals" or "Double Dutch", and the lyrics are as dire as ever

Hammer Of The Gods (which is scheduled for release at the end of next year) sounds potentially more interesting "It's the kind of movie no one's attempted to make about English rock 'n' roll," McLaren enthuses "It's not *Woodstock*, it's going down the road of *The Godfather*, where you see the mechanics of it all " Given some of Grant's habits, *The Godfather* sounds about right **DAVID EIMER** Paris *is out now on Vogue*



"When did I start playing? I guess I seriously got into the guitar around 71, 72, on my own pretty much I always liked the idea of the electric guitar, and then I got exposed to jazz. The rock guitarists didn't actually do very much."

Rudolph Grey lives — always has — in a part of Manhattan that used to be known as Hell's Kitchen. Once dominated by "would-be gangsters and roughnecks", it's now mainly Puerto Rican, though Grey's street is uncommonly weird — his half is an old terrace, on the other side it's all bright orange gentrification, an old car park redeveloped into cineplexes and housing blocks. Rudolph doesn't much care for it — even as a movie buff who once penned a book on the cinema, he's not much interested in seeing the latest Schwarzenegger over the road from his house.

His musical CV (roughly, from nowhere to No Wave bands such as Funeral Of Art, Red Transistor and, since 1978, The Blue Humans) is just as saturated by New York. Drawling like a character out of a 70s cop movie, he's a veritable library of information about the city's layered sonic archaeology from the 60s onwards.

"Well I tell you, the reputation of The Velvet Underground with the musicians in NYC that I knew, the sentiment was that they couldn't play. I could also tell you that VU never got any good reviews." To complete the sense of authenticity, Rudolph takes a call in mid-interview from no-fi saxophonist Arthur Doyle, and for his debut UK performance this month he's roped in *Wire* fave Charles Gayle — on drums!

When the conversation turns to the three CDs he has released on Thurston Moore's Ecstatic Peace label — *Transfixed*, *Mosk Of Light*, and *Clear To Higher Time*, each one full of dense, waveform improvisations of retina-burning intensity — the drawl comparatively dries up. "When you're playing through an amplifier one thing leads to another. It's a sort of instinctual thing, just like everything that's happened to the music I've been playing over the years. The original ideas come from free jazz, VU, composers like Xenakis, more things that had a total sound, extremes of sound. I'm sure New York affects me, just the aggressiveness. It gives things a hard edge.

"I remember I played at Max's Kansas City in 1978, I mean at that period on the rock scene they had no clue. And the review that came out said 'Rudolph Grey played a stupendous set which ended when he was down to one guitar string.' Which is not quite true, I broke maybe two strings. I don't know how much I could do on one guitar string." **JAKUBOWSKI** *Rudolph Grey appears at London's Disobey Club this month. See Sounding Off for details.*



It's hard work keeping tabs on the dance music underground. Too much comes and goes before you can press 'Play' and 'Record', but the flamboyance of the North London label **On Delancey Street** has made it easy to keep track of their savvy contributions to new music.

The label's top act goes by the mouth-numbing name of The Eccentric Afros Versus The Ballistic Brothers, its corporate (*sic*) packaging is a series of endearingly pathetic stick cartoons, and its attention-seeking output is bewilderingly idiosyncratic.

Run by veterans of London's mobile sound system circuit, the label's trademark format of hypnotic funk riffs studded with disarming samples plays on, parodies and generally picks apart the club music of the last 20 years. The Eccentric Afros' two EPs (the label's other ventures include releases from Marden Hill, Uschi and "some guys from Bournemouth") extend the concept of the old school breaks 'n' beats album into the realm of eccentric, instrumental HipHop, making connections with a host of contemporary performers from Tricky to DJ Shadow. "We've put a little package together," says Ashley Beadle, the label's founder, "made it interesting to the eye and thrown together our favourite loops."

Beadle (aka The Eccentric Afro) is the company's creative force (he also runs the House/Garage label Black Sunshine with his partner Carl Ramm). Having grown up with disco, witnessed the birth of rap and House and progressed into DJing and remixing (for Masters At Work, Manic Street Preachers, Shara Nelson and Urban Species among others) his musical tastes are understandably eclectic. During a brief interview he cites John Coltrane, The Beastie Boys, Bill Laswell ("I love that Black Arc shit"), The Treacherous Three, Art Blakey and the string-led sound of Philadelphia International as heroes and personal progenitors. It's this straddling and confusing of genres and boundaries that has put On Delancey Street out on its own, avoiding cliche and formula, making it a place to look for the sound of the future. **JAKE BARNES** The Eccentric Afros Versus The Ballistic Brothers Volumes One & Two *are available now through Vital.*

bites



In the parking lot of Barney's Beanerie, Hollywood, Greg Kurstin and Tommy Jordan of **Geggy Tah** are showing off their capoeira moves, gently kicking the air, swooping, tumbling and rolling with quiet grace in the style of the Brazilian 'soft' martial art/dance discipline they use as part of their group's live show. Their music reflects their energetic, quirky antics. As one of their songs puts it: *"The revolution will be fantasised."*

The duo have just released their debut album, *Grand Opening*, on David Byrne's Luaka Bop label. Byrne refers to the group as 'Californian World Music'. Actually, it's a circus of fun noises, loops, samples and vocal ditties, a kind of avant HipHop with dance and jazz overtones. The record features worked excerpts from a three hour tape they'd previously recorded with a song for every occasion. "A birth song, a death song, a sleeping song, a fishing song, a tucking-in song, a dreaming song, a square dancing song," says Tom. "I guess we are World Music in the literal sense but in terms of what people think of as World Music I guess we're in the rock/pop/soul vein. It's actually Pomonan," he says, alluding to their home town of Pomona, California, where they recorded *Grand Opening* in Jordan's home studio.

They talk like their music too, as we cover subjects ranging from skin-eating bacteria, American cheese, the colour of cereal as well as their previous musical projects working for David Lynch, on the music for the film *Groundhog Day* and on Michael Jackson's "Black And White" video. "We were supposed to play inside one of the goals for the World Cup as well, but we haven't heard from them," Tom says.

Their group name is derived from childhood mispronunciations of their forenames. They say they take their inspiration from anywhere, from the LA freeways to the minds of school children. "Our sisters are school teachers so that's definitely our laboratory. Those kids are a much harder audience. The music is diverse and it's seen as a strength, not a weakness," says Tom. "At least I hope so." **LAURA CONNELLY** *Geggy Tah appear in London this month at the* Now You See It *festival. See Sounding Off for details.*



Paul Dunmall frequently refers to himself as a "hermit" or an "idiot", and his pursuit of the saxophone over some 30 years has certainly been single-minded, ruling out any wider, more calculating view of the music industry. A new CD, *Quartet, Sextet & Babu Trio*, achieves that elusive jazz ideal: years of devotion to an instrument caught in an instant of brilliant music making, no extensive rehearsals, just head arrangements and first-takes in a quality recording studio resulting in a gorgeous swathe of bop and free playing with genuinely impassioned climaxes.

It's probably Dunmall's enthusiastic participation in so many contrasting genres — soul, hard rock, pop, salsa, funk, folk — that explains the depth and buoyancy of his playing. But it was always jazz that drew him. His father played drums in modern jazz groups of the 50s and got Paul his first paying job, at a Shaftesbury Avenue saxophone repair shop. "I remember us doing a load of work on Roland Kirk's tenor, extra keys, so he could play it one-handed."

In the early 60s, he joined a soul band, Element Of Truth, who told him to get a tenor sax and a satin shirt, and provided a grounding in horn arrangements and funk. Then, as the 60s developed, long hair and guitars beckoned. "I went right off jazz because I'd heard Jimi Hendrix. I wanted to do some things like that. I drilled a hole in my saxophone, had a bug stuck in there, the old volume control — I was outdoing the guitar players for volume!"

He joined a psychedelic cult band called Marsupalami and lived communally on a farm. "It was hippy time and it wasn't easy music, there were lots of different arrangements. There was never any money, but everything was supplied and who cared, you know dope and acid, all that, it was fantastic! We used to get up and practise every day."

In 1976, Dunmall toured with Johnny "Guitar" Watson in America, then riding high with *Ain't That A Bitch* (the 70s funk classic on which Dunmall played). All the while, Dunmall was practising John Coltrane's "Giant Steps" backstage, "driving Johnny and the rest of the musicians nuts". But the repetition of touring in a hit band took its toll, and Dunmall returned to England, joining the hard bop band Spirit Level and pioneering a free improvisation scene in Oxford, playing with musicians like Paul Rutherford, Louis Moholo and Keith Tippett.

Crucially, Dunmall realises that Coltrane's music cannot simply be repeated, and it's this willingness to experiment, to seize the possibilities of the moment — coupled with practical experience of so many musics that truly move people — that makes his music so vital. In the lukewarm shoals of 'British jazz' — awash with recycled currents and fake novelties — Dunmall is the real thing, a saxophonist with mountains of technique and a burning sense of purpose. Cause to celebrate. **BEN WATSON** Quartet, Sextet & Babu Trio *is out now on Slam (through Impetus and Cadillac).*

cultural industry and the south bank centre present
dates for your diary...

what happens when *tropicalismo* collides with *skronk?*
caetano veloso & arto lindsay
thursday 4 august

what music does david byrne listen to?
hear **luaka bop**
thursday
11 august

when is pretty ugly?
see **amanda miller's** new dance company with live music by **arto lindsay**,
wednesday
3 august

is ken campbell mad? or has he just read different books?
be **knocked sideways**
and find out
saturday
6 august

what would you hear on tiptoe street in accra, ghana?
the pan african orchestra/oren marshall trio/andy summers
wednesday
10 august

when is dance sculpture?
watch **molissa fenley** & **richard long** + new choreography to scores by **laurie anderson** & **arvo part**
friday 5 august



who was buddy bolden?
see **mike westbrook's** opera adapted from **michael ondaatje's coming through slaughter**
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SIRE

How Arto Lindsay is breaking the sound and language barriers



tropical transgressor

Calmly seated in his apartment on New York's West side, Arto Lindsay ticks off his recent activities "Things I did this year co-produced David Byrne's new record I immediately then went to Brazil to produce a record by a young Brazilian singer, Marisa Monte I just finished that record and now I am writing a ballet score for Amanda Miller, former Frankfurt Ballet choreographer-in-residence and now head of her own dance company, Pretty Ugly Productions I have a gig in Cologne, then I'm returning to New York, then I'm going to Brazil to prepare for a collaboration with Caetano [Veloso, the Brazilian poet, singer and guitarist] "

Trace the musical trajectory that former No New Yorker, DNA founder, Lounge Lizard and Ambitious Lover Arto Lindsay has followed over the last 15 years and no linear progression appears Undertakings seem disparate, with projects ping-ponging in numerous directions But look closer and a constant theme develops Lindsay spent his first two decades in Brazil, and his musical pursuits repeatedly return to the country's culture, playing out its relationships between rhythm, sound and language

"Because I was a teenager in Brazil in the 60s, I thought it was part of the purpose of pop music to change people's consciousness and spread information," he says "In the 6Ds, Brazilian pop was more aware of other styles because Brazil was to the side, not in the middle of everything Television reached the country and a generation came of age that was aware People loved all kinds of music — from The Beatles to The Rolling Stones to Brazilian folk to avant garde music like John Cage to serialism to 2Dth century classical music "

Lindsay's disparity of influences has led to a disparity of idioms the different voices, different vehicles by which he expresses the same concerns Take his work with cadence for instance, which plays a central role in Lindsay's sonic explorations In earlier Downtown platforms his ideas ranged from infusing his compositions with Latin percussion and polyrhythmic drumming to deconstructing beat, "seeing how far I could go off the beat and still keep people dancing "

His current rhythmic explorations wander even further At one of his shows in New York earlier this year, he interspliced mellifluous Portuguese singing and deadpan English translations with scales chopped from an electric 12 string At a second show three nights later, he delivered Portuguese vocals as his group incorporated funk and jazz moves into lithe sambas and baiaos.

Lindsay's Brazilian pop intrigues because it stretches the concept of cadence further, including it in the rhythmic relationship between music and words Such a coupling is not a new concept in Brazil the country's historically low literacy rate has long spawned a link between the aural and the oral, as well as sophisticated poetry and musical pairings and a sense of linguistic play that are the characteristics of Brazilian music

"We kind of had our high period in English of great pop songs, of music and lyrics really going together well," says Lindsay "Someone like Cole Porter was a total genius with the way the melodies and the meanings of the words went together, the mixture of slang with high art poetic technique Pop musicians that speak that language now are rare music got much simpler."

Lindsay's joint set with Caetano Veloso at London's *Now You See It* festival later this month will be, in many ways, a culmination of his bi-cultural life In the 6Ds, Veloso, a teenage "idol" and occasional collaborator with Lindsay, spearheaded Brazil's Tropicalismo movement (alongside Giberto Gil, Gal Costa and others) Tropicalismo, whose practitioners aimed to both validate Brazil's hybrid European, African and native American culture, as well as blur the boundaries between 'serious' and popular musics, has heavily influenced Lindsay's ideas about his Brazilian heritage and his approach to making music "Playing both avant garde and Brazilian pop doesn't seem like a break to me, a change in direction It just seems like a deepening of what I always did

"One of the subjects that Caetano and I are going to base our show on is the relationship between English and Portuguese, between North and South America We plan to [juxtapose] songs that share a similar subject matter or attitude, or that give the same sort of pleasure to the listener or to the performer For example, we might go from "Ave Maria Do Morro" — a song by Amy Barroso about the beauty of the Rio slum dwellers — to an Al Green song like "Jesus Is Coming" or "Simply Beautiful" " Indirectly, the duo's set will remark upon what Lindsay refers to as "the influences and limitations that language and culture have on music", directly, the set will expose an ignored Portuguese culture to an English-speaking world Lindsay has bridged that cultural chasm throughout his pursuits more people should follow his line **JULIE TARASKA**

For details of this month's Now You See It *festival, see Sounding Off*

ROBERT WYATT

GOING BACK A BIT-
A LITTLE HISTORY OF ROBERT WYATT

For a quarter of a century Robert Wyatt has been constantly hailed as one of the unique voices in British popular music. This retrospective double CD set spanning 21 years justifies such praise. Featuring material from Soft Machine, Matching Mole, his solo work and the many collaborations en route it features 28 tracks in all including previously unreleased material, BBC session tracks and other rarities.



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How AR Kane are uncorking the essence of pop

Eorth! Invisible! What is your urgent commond, if not transformation? — Rilke, *Ninth Elegy*

To hear the command and respond to it — that's one key to AR Kane's decorous drive. Speaking to Rudi Tambala and Alex Ayuli gives you a breath of rarefied air, not that they ever had much time for the pop biz's day-to-day ephemeralities. Even in 1987, when they released their first EP, "When You're Sad" (One Little Indian), following the success of "Pump Up The Volume" (they were the 'A' and 'R' in M/A/R/R/S), they were citing Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Sun Ra as guiding spirits. They've always kept a wise distance from the music machine, giving evasive interviews and loading their record sleeves with conundrums, lyrical fragments and arcane symbols.

This detachment has been creatively vital, but after recording two groundbreaking albums for Rough Trade, *69* (1987) and *"i"* (1989) — a period of non-stop activity and experimentation, which involved research trips to the Pyramids and to Iceland ("I won't say why, except it was to do with polar extremes," says Rudi now) — they covered their tracks and lost whatever career momentum they had attained. In 1990, before starting in on the third album, Alex took a short USA trip that turned into a permanent stay, and it became clear that further musical activity would have to take place out there. After recording "Water" for David Byrne's Luaka Bop compilation in 1991, and spending a year promoting it, Rudi moved to America for the duration of 1993 to work on the new album, *New Clear Child* (out this month on Third Stone), and once it was finished they needed to find a new label. Meanwhile both have recently become fathers.

All of which explains the yawning gap in public AR Kane activity, but doesn't account for the new sound that's emerged. *69* froze psychedelia into implausible ice sculptures, *"i"*'s four sides jumped between cosmic disco, classically textured dream pop, awestruck bliss-rock and jaunty dub mosaics. *New Clear Child* is more solidly on the rails, so musically and lyrically translucent that you almost long for some form of obfuscation. It begins with the sound of a child being born underwater, and ends — on the single, "Sea Like A Child" — with an alchemical transformation: *"Now he's o man of gold/Now he's o flame ..."* A new element for AR Kane, surely. "I think it represents that we're moving into a different plane," says Alex. "A lot of the record is about our own psychological transformation, the idea of a man turning to flame is the ultimate. It's meant to be a new beginning — we wanted it to be naked, like a child emerging."

Rudi elaborates. "The elements that AR Kane have usually connected to are air and water. Fire has always been the emotional side, like a physical emotion: that heat in your chest. Maybe the fire was missing before, but I think our relationship is more emotional now. It's heady — when we spent more time together it was explosive, you could feel the energy building up and that was reflected in the music. But as we've got older and we understand the music a little bit better, we can handle what's going on internally. It's like going on a date ..."

Rudi talks about 'perfect pop', about the way perfected forms such as a sonata or a 12 bar blues can act as Aeolian harps, letting the individual player's expression breathe through. Both stress that their music should be a clear, lucid expressive vessel, and talk of becoming more technically proficient ("So there's nothing in between, filtering," says Alex). Like Varèse, Jimmy Giuffre or ECM's Azimuth, they seem to be shifting their chosen form up an exalted gear. "The reason one experiments in the first place is to try to discover something, it's like research. Alex is interested in dub space, and there are morphing techniques that I'm interested in, but the music's affected by our environment as well. One man's experiment is another man's porridge, I guess."

It's easy to hear a sunkissed LA vibe on *New Cleor Child*, although warped through AR Kane's peculiar acoustic sensibility, it's like watching a bustling city from inside a soundproofed skyscraper. "We like the hum and rattle of a string in an artificial space," says Rudi. "We sample a lot of our guitars and arpeggios so that the faults repeat again and again: eventually your brain adapts to that pattern."

Rudi perceives their music making as a necessary kind of empowerment. "I don't think we're about control, but about refining what's essentially us. There are certain things we consider brash and unwholesome, and there's also our heritage as Europeans, which is classical, not blues." Perhaps the bravest art forms transcend sentimentality at the same time as shedding their influences. "Sentimentality has a place, but sometimes it can block out higher emotions. It can take up a lot of space. We like things that seem more objective. Rilke's *Ten Elegies*, the Rembrandt *Self Portraits*, Sufi poetry, the Sphinx."

AR Kane have removed themselves from the galère of stylists and historians that comprise 'alternative' pop's new mainstream, both spiritually and geographically. Rudi lives in deepest Herts, Alex has made a home in Renaissance, California. "It might be our life's work," says Alex. "It's a part of our essence." What about the early critical response to the band, which centred on ideas of loss of control, helplessness and misogyny? "It modelled our universe for a while," Rudi says, "but eventually the apple falls upwards, from the ground to the tree. Everything's moved on." **ROB YOUNG**

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original gangsta



Johnny "Guitar" Watson,

the Mr Bad Ass of lowdown and dirty 70s funk, is back — in control and stretching out with the cream of LA's HipHop community. Ben Watson (no relation) reports from Hollywood.

Gangsta Rap — it's the only thing really happening in Stateside black music. And the current pre-eminence of Ice-T, Ice Cube, Doctor Dre and Snoop Doggy Dogg is drawing attention to the West Coast black music underground from which they spring. In *It's Not About A Salary*, a recent 'brief history' of US HipHop, writer Brian Cross traced rap's West Coast lineage back through the decades. In Britain, 50s and 60s Rhythm & Blues aficionados generally look to the East for the true heartlands of black popular music — it was records made in Chicago and Memphis that fuelled our Blues Boom — but the West Coast has just as lively a tradition.

When economic necessity — and the new possibilities of amplification — led LA bandleader/drummer Johnny Otis to pare down his big band in the late 40s, using electric bass and drums and just a few horns, the instrumentation he arrived at had parallels in Chicago, but the music maintained a swing and musical sophistication far removed from the electrified rural blues of Muddy Waters. The proximity of Hollywood invited aspirant black singers to emulate Nat King Cole's success as a "sepia Sinatra" — cooing blues and ballads over tinkling cocktail piano.

Only in such a context could you imagine the emergence of a musical virtuoso like Johnny "Guitar" Watson — a musician whose precision and decisiveness with a single note is chilling (his playing has that fantastic, elusive, *on-the-money* quality that you can also hear in bebop drummer Max Roach, Jamaican guitarist Ernest Ranglin, alto saxophonist John Zorn, and precious few others). Born in Houston, Texas in 1935, he began recording in LA in the early 50s. His first recordings were issued under the name Young John Watson, playing piano, before he decided to adopt the instrument Clarence "Gatemouth" Brown had inspired him to play back in Texas. His brash, rocking guitar breaks (Watson can truly make the guitar 'talk') and the hard, smooth, saxophone-like drive of his voice need to be heard to be believed: both Jimi Hendrix and Frank Zappa hailed him as a formative influence.

However, Watson refused to be tagged as just a 'bluesman', as he puts it, "I started out as blues because that's all there was during that time!" In the early 60s he updated his sound with Tamla beats, introduced strings on "Cuttin' In" (a song — and arrangement — which got Johnny Halliday his first hit), cut a set of Fats Waller tunes with The Three Sounds (*Fats' Bag*), and a superb album of jazz standards for Chess (*I Cried For You*). The fact that Watson can play with chilling precision doesn't necessarily mean he has a desire to play all those fancy notes beloved of jazzers. The British saxophonist Paul Dunmall, who toured with him in 1976/7, explained Watson's relationship to jazz by describing a private jam at his house:

"They were really raving — and then they played some jazz, a good piano player, and someone said, 'Johnny, can you play like that?' Johnny said, 'I could if I had to, but I don't want to do that, I don't have to do that, it's a hard life, the jazz musician's life.' He told us how he sat in with these jazz musicians and they called the hardest tunes they could possibly think of to give him a roast-up and he didn't quite make it, and he said if you didn't make it you were out. He said if he'd gone in there and burned through it, he'd have been well in there. He said Miles Davis told him to play the guitar, play the blues."

When funk came around, Watson was as receptive as he had been to soul. In the early 70s he cut a great album for Fantasy using André Lewis, a Sly Stone-style, wild-soul-man-of-technology figure, on synths. When he got a contract with DJM for an album, he was ready to put all these influences — blues, Hollywood schmaltz, jazz and hi-tech funk — into one masterpiece *Ain't That A Bitch*.

It wasn't just the superb, stripped-to-the-bone, every-note-counts arrangements, the witty social protest lyrics (*"The present situation is abstract!"*), the tightest of horn sections (Dunmall was on board), or the seamless integration of irresistible funk and Hollywood swing that made *Ain't That A Bitch* such a brilliant record: the *sound* of the album was great, too.

"Radio Shack at that time were using the product to demonstrate their stereos," explains Watson. "Kerry McNabb [the album's engineer], who put Paramount Studio together, was Frank Zappa's personal engineer, that's how I met him. He was an absolute genius, man. It was just superbly recorded, that's all I can say. With the horn things, I just said, bring me some manuscript, man, and we'd play the track and I'd go out to the piano, man, and root-bap-bam! That's how we'd do it, man. We did it on studio time, which was *insane*, they thought — and I thought too, later [laughs] — specially with studio rates at that time, boy, they were high!"

Since *Ain't That A Bitch*, Johnny "Guitar" Watson has continually issued records which stay abreast of new developments — the hilarious "Strike On Computers" complained of guitar technology putting him out of work (*"Damn thing played all by itself!"*). A record on A&M, *That's What Time It Is*, was a mistake Watson now acknowledges — bringing in a name producer (Michael Zager, though it was hardly his fault) meant he lost the distinctive 'sound' he'd previously realised by producing himself and playing everything but drums and horns.

(Dunmall comments that Steve Neill, Watson's bassist and a brilliant jazz musician who later played with Pharoah Sanders, pulled out of the *Ain't That A Bitch* sessions because he felt he wasn't offered enough money, so Watson played the bass parts himself.)

"I had an experience with Herb Alpert [Watson played on Alpert's 80s 'tropical fusion' album *Rise*], and everybody said, 'Jesus, man, what's wrong with him, he went crazy, that's not Johnny Watson, what are you doing?' Well, anyway, that was a terrible experience, it deflated my whole thing, man, I was saying, 'Oh God, what is this?' My legal advisors were telling me, [whispers] 'Man! don't say anything, man, it's a seven figure deal, don't say anything!' It's kind of hard to put into words about getting the attitude right on all the instruments, make everything match."

The new single is called "Bow Wow" (released on Al Bell's label, and a reassertion of the canine imagery that stretches from *Ain't That A Bitch* and its outrageous cover, to George Clinton's "Atomic Dog" and Snoop's current concept) and of course the music and production relate to what's happening now. Call it New Blue Gangsta. As Robert N Rooks, one-time promo man for the Bihari brothers' Speciality label, remarked, Watson can relate to the young rap stars because "he wears the same clothes, the gold, the hats — hell, he looks like them!"

Being with Johnny "Guitar" Watson is an experience in itself. According to the late Frank Zappa, Watson has every right to feel embittered by the way the industry has sidelined him, but my two encounters with him [at Paramount Studio and in the rooftop restaurant of the Holiday Inn on the intersection of the San Diego freeway and Sunset Boulevard] were quite hilarious. Watson is a larger than life, wise-cracking figure who makes everyone around him smile and laugh. Of course his turquoise and cream Oldsmobile has licence plates that read "GITAR W" and his shirts are so bright they hurt the eyes. His conversation is peppered with Hollywood biz-jargon and street talk in quick succession.

We talked about his forthcoming album. "The songs are a cross between the contemporary R&B sound that I normally do, with the HipHop sounds — naturally, because as usual I like my music to sound 'now'. I'm also incorporating the services of a couple of young brothers around the city who are very competent programmers. I don't have time to learn the machine and create the music at this point. All the rappers, the kids are using my samples, so I'm saying, 'Wait a minute, it must be cool!' So I may as well go 'head on and use a little of the kids' thing and get into that market. That's where my head is at this point. I'm thinking too about asking a couple of my friends, like Easy E and Ice Cube and Yo Yo, a few of them that sample my stuff, to maybe do a track or two with me. I don't want to miss the market, so I don't want to do too much of it, to where it don't fit what I'm doing, you see, I just want to add just enough so that the music sounds right for the stations so that when they play it it will match the music."

Johnny talks the language of the market like the sussed, knowing industry hustler he is. He is unwilling to be yesterday's hit — and his enthusiasm for the new sounds is evidently unforced. "So many things in my head at this point, man, with Doctor Dre, man, and Doggy Dogg, it's phew! This HipHop thing, man, I have to watch that, I love it so much! It's — phew! — I just don't want it to do *too much* to me at this point. I know some of my fans will say, 'What's wrong with him? He's gone crazy!' I want to just be cool and marry that shit and make sure it's cool, you know what I'm saying, that's the whole idea. I'm also incorporating a little more guitar work in these next things, because a lot of people say, 'Man, you need to play more guitar.' They've been telling me that over the years and I couldn't understand it — now I understand it! I'm also incorporating some blues — I generally always do one blues on each of the albums, but this time I'm going to do a little more blues, with a touch of 'now', to give it a little face-lift so to speak."

All right then, Johnny — but after the New Blue Gangsta tip, can we have an album of blues and ballads with a piano trio, please? The one you say would need to be cut live, no overdubs? It'll blow Harry Connick Jr out of the water — and that's a promise! □



"All the rappers are using my samples, so I'm saying: wait a minute, it must be cool!"

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rveillance

The Scanner CDs, which feature intercepted cell phone conversations set to music, have generated a storm of controversy. What do they tell us about our ideas of privacy, voyeurism and vicarious living? Paul Schütze surveys the issues.

The ends of centuries are characteristically periods of seething conjecture on uncertain futures and mythologized pasts. As we now approach a *fin de millenium* I guess we can expect this tendency to become much amplified.

Popular culture, both fringe and mainstream, is ripe with futurist extrapolation of the prefixes 'cyber' and 'virtual'. We are all going to bathe, plunge, swim or dissolve into some suspiciously metaphysical zone of pure information which Chaos Theory suggests will contain a conveniently obscure and well concealed truth. It is no coincidence that the most articulate exponents of cyberpunk writing (Gibson in *Neuromancer*, Shepard in *Green Eyes* and Bear in *Bloodmusic*) each propose a transcendence of the corporeal with science as the catalyst. The Net, the Web, the Matrix or the Grid all implicitly support a passive immobility. Consequently, this cargo cult of apparent Techno lust is more about escaping the body and the machines that extend it than it is about fetishizing science.

The *Scanner* series of CDs (two volumes to date) features the scanned (intercepted) cell phone conversations of unsuspecting phone users — edited and placed in minimal musical settings to create compelling and unsettling sound pieces. I am writing here as much about the hype surrounding the series as I am about the discs themselves. As a musician I am interested in the various ways in which a work or an idea can be mutated from its origins by fanciful writing or overzealous appropriation by a music press starved of ideas. Much of what has been claimed for the *Scanner* series misses the real points raised by the works. Ironically, whenever I speak to Robin Rimbaud, the

man behind *Scanner*, he is very clear about what he is doing and its implications. Clearly the confusion is not authorial. At a time when the fragile births of many excellent hybrid musics are threatened under the crushing bulk of cynical 'Ambient' noodling with its attendant hype-storm, we have to stare down the pseudo-science that passes as critical discourse and get pragmatic!

Our obsessive consumption of information is just that: consumption, and largely for its own sake. Forget the Global Village and the whirlwind of postmodern information theory (the rarefied distillation of meaning from indifference) that was distinguished only by its complete lack of blood, this is appetite plain and simple. And, like all appetites, it is basic, unthinking and, when perpetually satisfied, immobilizing.

As the *Scanner* series so perfectly demonstrates, we have the technology to peel open virtually any zone of information and consume the contents. Personal video documents, sound recordings, phone scans, telephotographs, modem and net intercepts are all highly personalized and voyeuristic forms of grazing for infofoods. Some of these satisfy other appetites.

Scanning is a unique form of observation as there is no chance of apprehension, at least not by your subject. Unlike a random nuisance call, the subject is unaware of the observer. The press release for *Sconner* claims that American satellites intercept all UK mobile phone calls and yet I suspect that most people would be more alarmed at having their conversations appear on *Sconner Three* or *Four* than by interception in space. (I am boggled by the thought of some poor fucks in the American secret service having to wade through 200,000 calls a day looking for subversive material. As the corpse of the Cold War is flayed in ever more baroque ways, it becomes apparent that, far from being about information gathering and analysis, the Cold War was about the indiscriminate consumption and hoarding of subjective, irrelevant and often inaccurate facts that were then used to justify actions predetermined by long standing enmity and paranoia.)

The *Scanner* discs are irresistible as they satisfy and illustrate several phenomenal appetites unique to our time. One: Righteous Paranoia. *Scanner* proposes a sinister scenario of omnipresent and amoral observation and surveillance that, as shown in the choice of material, invades areas regarded as inviolably private: intimate phone sex, personal soul bearing and conflict (each conducted by phone precisely because they do not suit the permanence and reviewability of letters), various illegal or secret negotiations, etc.

Two: Vicarious Living. *Scanner* also provides the listener with a safely anonymous window into the real life dramas that are unsated by the dramatised scenarios of film and television. Check the trends in America, Europe and Australia for televised real life, real murder, real autopsies, real police beatings. None of this stuff exemplifies a desire for understanding, only a desire to watch, to observe. It's not that anyone would actually want to be at the scene to intervene or assist. The most frequent activity at such scenes is a scramble to tape the proceeding for subsequent sale to a TV network. This appetite has now become self-generating and has outgrown the original need to know rationale of things like 'cop cam' on tabloid television.

Three: Voyeurism. This is the most basic appetite satisfied by *Scanner*; the often sexual desire to observe the unaware in moments that are absolutely assumed to be private. It would be disingenuous to argue that the principal appeal of *Scanner* was not voyeuristic (Robin Rimbaud certainly doesn't). Sure we can be appalled by the further erosion of our private zones, and the dubious uses to which the now unchecked numbers of domestic or industrial scanners may put this material (your next contract killing or spanking appointment could be immortalized by The Orb or Aphex Twin!). But we love to watch and listen, despite our indignation when we become the observed.

On *Scanner* the strand of paranoia about being the observed rather than the observer is tweaked by the emotively ominous musical settings. These don't quite allow an open analysis of the phenomena of scanning as presented because you are actively encouraged to regard the material as sinister before you have even digested its content. We can toy with the utopian 'global' idea — vast welcoming seas of information from which will rise, unbidden and without the exercise of any critical faculties, THE TRUTH. If we are genuinely troubled by the CIA or MI6 or whoever is listening in, if we feel paranoid about our privacy and the ethics of 'observation', then to listen more than once or twice to the *Sconner* releases is problematic.

But you will listen again and again and the people you play it to will purchase it and talk about it because it is exquisitely, irresistibly voyeuristic. The knowledge that the action that you observe unnoticed is performed within a space, electronic or otherwise, of assumed privacy is rare and thrilling. More so in a cultural environment where 99 per cent of recorded artefacts are blandly self-conscious ciphers of the voyeur's ideal. When millions of people watch *Days Of Our Lives*, *Neighbours* or *Brookside* participation is passive or minimal. The anonymous distance is the buzz. This is why virtual reality is ultimately a nonsense, as few people actually want to interact. This would involve making decisions.

Scanner's principal value is the crystallization of a numb paradox of privacy and invasion. We are paralysed by the need to consume information, to form opinions on events in countries 16,000 miles away, based on disinformation, lies and the subjective agenda of our sources — but at least *we know what's going on*! We are unable to see an end to any idea or to see that the burden of all this is stasis and an immobility that may as well be physical. It is not surprising that the futile promise of living in an artificially generated brain space that looks like a Pet Shop Boys video has turned half the world's thinkers into gibbering silicon prophets and seen the re-animation of escapologists like Robert Anton Wilson and Timothy Leary. Neither is it surprising that the reluctantly deified William Gibson is shocked and horrified by his worshipful cyberfans and holds them in bemused contempt for "missing the point".

Still, these *fins de siècle* and *fins de millenium* tend to ease up after the big year, so perhaps in about seven years things might calm down a bit. Just hold off getting those unsightly silicon grafts and forehead SCSI ports till the hysteria has died down. Perhaps by then we could resist a project like *Sconner*, but for now you *know* you want them in *your* home.

Scanner Volumes One & Two *are available on Touch (through Vital). Robin Rimbaud (Sconner) and Paul Schutze (Uzect Ploush) play at Quirky, The Vox, South London on 5 August. See Sounding Off for details.*

united state of mind

With a new album and book, multimedia artist Laurie Anderson has washed a few ghosts right out of her hair. Kim Green pays her a visit in New York. Photography by Kevin Knight.

For Laurie Anderson the boundaries are down. She is an illustrator, a photographer, a singer, a scientist, a dancer, an actress and an author. She has redefined the process of making art without particularly trying to. Her work is mesmerising, unsettling, weird, scary and ridiculous all at the same time. She makes art, but uses technology. She makes music, but it needs pictures. She takes pictures, but you can't 'see' them without music. She has taken the idea of music to its own outer bounds by giving it a view with texture. She is known for transforming herself into a man, an androgyne or even a movie star.

Her work can be called 'strange' or 'avant garde', though Laurie Anderson is not, really. Her art is simply what art was meant to be: unlimited and realised to its fullest. Her music is only a fragment of her art, and probably why it is so often misunderstood or over-analysed. It's almost not worth discussing without its other parts, it is a soundtrack to the activity in her mind and lands with lights, smoke machines, microphones, speakers, screens, costumes and machinery attached.

She greets me at the door of her cool and comfortable downtown loft and is surprisingly petite and attractively frumpy. The days of her trademark spiked haircut are long gone. Her grown-in hair is up in a clip, with wisps falling down in back and the layered hairs on top frame her face with suburban bangs. "I just haven't gotten around to cutting it. But I won't. I got sick of it the other way," she says, tucking in the unruly wisps. Her voice trails off as if she's not sure what the deal is with her hair anymore. That seems to be the way it is with Laurie Anderson. She's not sure of things, but she moves ahead with them anyway. She stops herself in mid-thought just as she's about to be sure, she's not. Which is probably why she could never just write a song and sing it. "On second thought, it needs pictures or a dance or a gas mask to go with it. Maybe on third thought, it just needs to be put through a vocal processor to add a new dimension to it. Maybe it needs all of that. Just maybe. So I'll try it and see."

Once in a while, in the middle of her violin-laced, almost classical, soundtrack-like compositions, comes a rare and inspired *pure* moment. It could be a sensitive instrumental or a pretty song, where her voice shines through unmarred by technology or cryptic insights. It could be a simple ditty with a breathless vocal delivery that results in a mainstream hit (like "O Superman"). These rare moments are as surprising to her as they are to those who enjoy them. "I've never had the ambition to write something that most people would like. I'm too much of a snob. If a lot of people like it, it is probably not good," she says.

In the past, she has shied away from being too 'direct', claiming that it sets off an imaginary alarm inside her that she calls "the cringe factor". "I really trust my instincts completely and when I write something that makes me slightly uncomfortable, usually it's because it's a little too pat or a little too preachy, too self-satisfied or something that other people wouldn't care about or get. Just completely personal. But the things I like, it's because they make me stop for a second. I really like songs that just meander, so that the story is the beat and it comes at unexpected times and grabs you that way and you put in your most perceptive thoughts right at the downbeat."

Laurie Anderson seemingly has trouble leaving things as they are





"I'm feeling fine thanks.

Not one single suicidal impulse."

Take her approach to the violin, for example. Over the years she has added neon lights to its innards making it glow, and she even attached a tape recorder inside it so that it could play by itself or perform a duet with her.

It all started in Chicago. "I was the kind of kid that would get there early to feed the fish... 'there' being school. I knew I wanted to be an artist because of the art teachers. They would come to school wearing really odd things and they'd say 'Do whatever you want' and the most important thing is they'd leave. They got to *go* before school was out. They'd just *leave* the premises and I thought, 'I want to be that person, who can just leave and break all these stupid rules. These rules are driving me crazy!' So that's what I wanted to be. I was a nerd but trying to disguise myself. So I'd do things to compensate, like being a cheerleader, because I was embarrassed about being President of the National Honors Society."

So, in her everlasting search to *get out*, she has created a body of work that reflects her goal: to break the rules. Who says an artist must stick to one medium? Who says that all music should be melodic and women should shy away from technology? If it's rules that drive Laurie Anderson crazy, then her work makes perfect sense.

She moved to New York, "because it was one hour later, darker and exciting." And although she still lives in the city, a strange part of her is still wandering around Chicago. "I'm not sure I've gotten out yet. I still have this thing that there's that one course in school... I'll get a letter that says, 'You didn't pass that Chemistry course, we just found a mistake in our records and everything you've done since then is really pretty much useless pieces of paper.'"

Her fear of never being totally *out* is probably what drives her work, work that is overabundant, long-winded and miraculous, and which gave life to a once dusty whim, 'performance art'. In New York she "found this wonderful world... the art world", and transformed it. "I still feel connected to a lot of those ideas and a lot of the people." She drops incredibly cool, downtown names, and has just returned from Israel where she was "tagging along" with Lou Reed — "It was fun watching someone else have sound problems."

Her early years in New York were spent making ends meet. She spent time as an art critic and an art teacher. She recalls teaching a lecture on ancient architecture and not knowing anything about it and making up the whole thing. "I had a chequered career as a teacher." She also tells of once needing money so badly that she sat in a publisher's office with a book of her drawings waiting for an entire day until someone would see her. "It's really fun to sit in an office waiting like this [she feigns a blank stare] just waiting, waiting, waiting."

Laurie Anderson is an admitted "bullshitter". "I'm proud of it actually. I have no pride about a lot of things." And so in the last few weeks she has begun to remove the mask she's been hiding behind for the last 20 years. She has just compiled a book, *Stones From The Nerve Bible*, a retrospective of her long career. It is a Laurie Anderson scrapbook, with fragments from every corner of her life experience. There are pictures of her as a young, long haired artist in New York playing violin on the streets, on ice skates that were frozen into a block of ice. The concert was over when the ice melted. *(Continued on page 72)*

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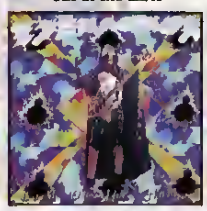
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PHOTOS CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT DRIVE LIKE JEHU RODAN SEBADOH TRUMANS WATER POLVO PAVEMENT CENTRE SIX FINGER SATELLITE

hi lo jinks

All across America, in the dark recesses of the rock underground, strange shapes are moving, and they have names like Grifters, Trumans Water, Pavement, Polvo, Rodan and Six Finger Satellite. This is the Lo-fi network, and Jakubowski is plugged in.

If 1992 was 'the year punk broke' — or so argued Sonic Youth — then 1994 might seem like the year rock, whether punk or not, broke up, or at the very least became sublimely uninteresting. If it seems too pat to declare Grunge dead simply because of the tragic physical death of its high priest, Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, it should be understood that what was often labelled Grunge was more often than not unreconstructed Metal in disguise. The bands that seemed closest to Nirvana in attitude and 'design' — the sloppy, dazed melodic sludge of Dinosaur Jr, Mudhoney and Buffalo Tom — got nowhere commercially, while those groups with more than a passing nod to Metal's vicious crunch cleaned up, in recent months, follow-up albums by Soundgarden, Nine Inch Nails and Pantera have all gone crashing into the *Billboard* Top Ten, and all to fairly complete indifference from a media more interested in raking over the ashes left by Cobain's self-destruction.

Grunge, the last gasp of a supposedly intelligent pure pop-rock, and its attendant ideas of an 'alternative revolution', has simply disappeared into the chasm between the neo-metallurgists and the independent underground, but not without first posing searching questions as to the validity and worth of the four-piece guitar based rock group.

Perhaps it's the unconscious realisation that there is something fundamentally exhausted (as well as increasingly exhausting) about the idea of a simplistic guitar rave-up that's twisted the American underground scene of the past three years into such strange shapes. Groups such as The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion and Royal Trux (both featuring ex-members of Pussy Galore), or Riot Grrrl bands like Heavens To Betsy and Bratmobile, have ditched the bass so necessary to rock's rumble and undertow, while others, Girls Against Boys, Mercury Rev, Grifters, Six Finger Satellite, have incorporated flute, trombone, didgeridoo, saxophone, extra drums, noisemaking devices and cheap analogue synths into their line-ups. It's as if by brandishing this junkstore of high school band instruments like a hex, these bands can keep the spectre of the death of rock at bay for another album or two.

Far more interesting is what's being done with these mini orchestras. Where Grunge was fed through a surprisingly clean production, courtesy of a limited cadre of professional producers (Butch Vig, Jack Endino, Andy Wallace), and pressed onto pristine CDs, so-called Lo-fi rock is smothered in jarring dissonance, self-produced in garages, bedrooms or local community studios for little or no cost and then released on cheap, scratchy vinyl. Like scavengers, bands such as Grifters, Pavement and Guided By Voices scrape up the remaining dregs of rock music's past glories (early Roxy Music and Fleetwood Mac being unexpected examples), only to warp them through genuinely unique sensibilities: the zero attention span chop-and-change pop collages of Guided By Voices, Pavement's fetish for 70s Krautrock, Grifters' lackadaisical attitude.

"A grifter is a conman," admits the group's Scott Dawson. "We see stuff after the fact, and we can correlate that we grift all this music and actually have people believe it's good. We get slagged for having records that sound like compilations, whereas most groups now, they have their shtick and beat you over the head with it for ten or 12 songs. All the combinations haven't been exhausted, we're just trying to find them. It's not unlike being in a jazz band where someone comes in and says, 'Here's five chords, let's run with it.' They have the technique, we flip a coin and see what happens."

"A grifter

is a conman.

We grift all this

music

and actually have

people believe it's good."



The emergence of the Lo-fi groups can partly be attributed to a conscious reaction against Grunge (its sense of machismo, and major label adoption), but it can also be explained by the fact that in 1991, when Nirvana spearheaded the alternative takeover of the American rock (read music) industry, the independent economy of the country's post-hardcore scene had been virtually wiped out. The collapse of labels like SST and What Goes On in 1989, followed closely by the demise of Rough Trade and several distribution chains, and the desertion en masse of virtually the entire roster of the Blast First and SST labels for the majors, were all factors that forced surviving labels such as Touch And Go and Dischord, as well as newcomers like Sympathy For The Record Industry, Drag City and Matador among others, to rethink and rebuild.

The ultimate Lo-fi fetish of a limited edition vinyl 7" release, usually split between two groups, owes as much to the enforced economies of that period as it does to any misplaced ideals of punk purity and petulant elitism. Already, more mainstream alternative acts are starting to use the vinyl-only route as a gimmick, for instance, The Breeders are about to release a vinyl EP featuring covers of Lo-fi songs by Guided By Voices and Sebadoh, while Steve Albini has requested that the cassette and CD formats of Shellac's debut album be released six weeks after the vinyl. By contrast, genuine Lo-fi groups such as San Diego's Trumans Water and North Carolina's Polvo view these low-key business practices and limited edition releases as a nurturing ground.

"The main reason we're Lo-fi is because of the money thing," explains Kevin of Trumans Water. "If you record on your boom-box at home or in a cheap studio, it's gonna come out that way. Lo-fi seems to work, it's impressive to me, because you can't do these things with expensive equipment." Ash Bowie of Polvo adds, "I like what a Lo-fi production can do for a band. It makes the music more challenging."

Grunge was inextricably linked to Seattle. Lo-fi, on the other hand, is a scene without a single physical space, a network with various nodes of origin but minus a central core. "All of a sudden a couple of bands make it big, and people all over say, 'Let's move to Seattle'," is how Scott of the Memphis based Grifters dismissively refers to the development of geographically specific musical scenes. "I guarantee that 75 out of 100 bands in Seattle aren't from there. Whereas there are basically five bands in Memphis, and we're kinda isolated. The other bands don't understand the touring ethic. They think, 'Oh, we'll just rule Memphis by default.'" Jason Noble of Rodan, who hail from Louisville, Kentucky, explains it slightly differently. "I feel that with the peers we have, with the bands we tour with [the list includes Shellac, Grifters and Tsunami], the people in Louisville putting out our records, or with Simple Machines [Tsunami's label], we've established a community with this band. We couldn't do this at all without people aiding us almost daily."

Given that the Lo-fi network spans both coasts and much of the interior of the US, it is remarkably socially incestuous. But Lo-fi groups combine intense peer awareness without the peer pressure that comes from living and working within a big-city scene. "It's not a competition," says Tara Jane O'Neill, Rodan's bass player, while Ash Bowie admits feeling affinities with "lots of bands. We just toured with Trumans Water. I've never felt we were that different from other groups." And of course, Trumans Water feel "a kinship there" with Polvo.

(Continued on page 73)



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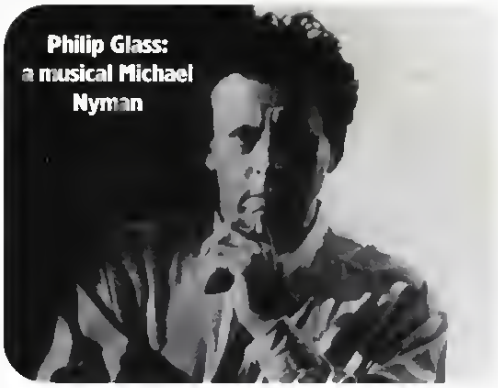
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naked eye

Minimalism is one of the most influential and successful musics of the 90s. So what, says Andy Hamilton.


Philip Glass: a musical Michael Nyman

Minimalism is the biggest commercial success story in 20th century art music. Think of some recent events. Philip Glass's *La Belle Et La Bete*, Louis Andriessen's *Meltdown* festival on the South Bank (a veritable minimalist bean feast), Michael Nyman's soundtrack for Jane Campion's film *The Piano*, Steve Reich's *The Cave*, Górecki's chart-topping *Third Symphony* ... the music is inescapable.

For some, the success is more than commercial. "Minimalism is the most significant evolution in Western art music since Schoenberg," said the American composer John Adams in a recent interview. Probably the most interesting of the American minimalists — which isn't saying a lot — Adams believes he's now moved on to a music "less precise, more all-encompassing". But then what could be less encompassing, less ambitious, less likely to flow from the wellsprings of musical creativity, than minimalism?

Of course there's a problem defining just what is 'minimalist' and what isn't. Minimalism, as I'm taking it, is American in origin, and began in the late 50s and early 60s as a tonal reaction, at first unconscious and then explicit, to Schoenberg's 12-tone (serial) system and its academic musical ascendancy. 'Trance composers' such as La Monte Young and Terry Riley were the godfathers, Steve Reich and Philip Glass the major figures — and now Michael Torke is the second generation, and Michael Nyman a British representative. Motoric rhythms, repetitive melodic cells, slow harmonic change and a static dynamic level characterised the new minimalist sound-world.

Philip Glass — think of him as a kind of musical Michael Nyman — was once forced to drive a taxi in New York to earn a living. At the time (50s/60s) he famously described the impact of Pierre Boulez and his serial hegemony. "A wasteland, dominated by these maniacs, these creeps, who were trying to make everyone write this crazy, creepy music." Glass was able to give up his taxi some time in the 70s, the "crazy, creepy music" of Schoenberg and Webern, never mind Boulez and Milton Babbitt, has understandably never caught on with the larger musical public. Minimalists are not maniacs or creeps, but their tedious music now fills concert halls and makes many of them wealthy, by 'art music' standards. But the music is more of a wasteland even than total serialism.

Minimalism has many precedents — the interesting but minor talent of Erik Satie, Ravel's *Bolero* (a wretched piece even before Torvill and Dean massacred it), Carl Orff's mock-medieval meanderings. But the label has been extended so often as to be almost meaningless. In Europe, Gyorgy Ligeti arrived at a kind of minimalism independently. The hieratic 'minimalism' of Part, Górecki and Tavener is far removed from the sleek, urban and urbane neuroses and vacuous allusions to exotic, Eastern spiritualities that underpin the work of the American minimalists. Its roots lie deep in the traditions of plainchant and, for Górecki — who denies being a minimalist — the folk music of the Tatra mountains. The case of Louis Andriessen is more complicated, but all these composers either have written extensively or still do write in other idioms.

And the Americans? Glass's minimalism was apparently inspired by Indian raga, though it sounds nothing like it — and there's no parallel in complexity. More important is his affinity with avant garde artists like Sol LeWitt and Richard Serra — a recurring theme with minimally musical composers including Cage. As Glass put it, "I gravitated towards artists because they were always more open than musicians ... They were more interested, really, in what I was doing." Whatever the origins, though, in the end you only have your ears to rely on, and to mine there's a world of difference between the beautiful simplicity of Part's *Passio* and the endless banalities of Glass's *Akhnaten*.

So, for contemporary composition in the 90s, is it a choice between the wasteland of modernism and — a few fragile holy flowers excepted — the wasteland of minimalism? The period of art music has been comparatively concentrated, historically and geographically — roughly, Western music from the 18th century to the present. (Maybe there are non-Western art musics, but in any case the term doesn't imply a value judgment.) It is music for listening to. It is non-functional — not for dancing, not for accompanying religious observation. Tonal music has been central. Built on tension and release, it involves the possibility of development, of a dramatic dimension. Ironically, like its serial enemy, minimalism has tried to abolish that opposition — though instead of constant tension, there's constant consonance. Meditation, trance-like states, whether drug-induced or not, go together with the minimalist ethos — a subjective response to the music, if it's a response at all, masquerading as "loss of self".

Minimalism tries to perpetuate art music dishonestly. (Marxist and postmodern critiques at least reject the idea honestly.) In reality it's a kind of 'easy listening' music, with the paradox that involves genuine listening is actually impossible, because there's nothing there to listen to. The issue is in the end about the philosophy of music. If there is 'art music', and listening to it requires more than a subjective response, then minimalism is a dead end. It is not, despite John Adams's absurd claim, even trying to answer the same — artistic — problems.

The music of our time faces agonising postmodern dilemmas. Minimalism, as a general response, is far too easy. Arvo Part is a one-off. As Schoenberg said, the basic distinction is not "serial/non-serial" but "good music/bad music". And to decide what is good music, try paraphrasing Eddie Condon's question. "Does it enter the ear like honey, or like Glass?" □

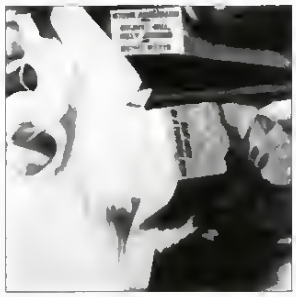
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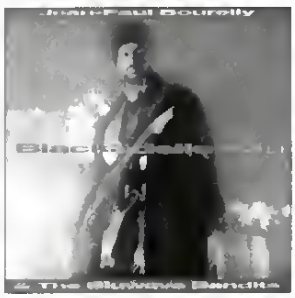
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Jon Hassell's new music is an exotic domain of ritualised sex, strange tonalities, erotic transgressions and invisible connections. David Toop enters the pleasure dome.

"Peeling to the lethargic beat of tumescent music, she wore vivid makeup, glitter in her hair and crystalline clothes, all hooks, straps, sequins and secret snappers. The stripper's art needs special garments made to tear away like the husk of a pomegranate. So you do not notice the woman as she is, because you are looking for fulfilment of the mind's eye. You are examining an idea — depravity or pleasure, or their perilous symbiosis." — David Thomson, *Suspects* (1985)

In 1985, in a creeping, convoluted trail suggestive of plant growth, the British film critic and author David Thomson constructed a novel, or a lattice of biographical sketches, from the imaginary web of lives as they might have been lived by cinematic characters outside the frame of the cinema screen. These characters — Walker from *Point Blank*, Norma Desmond from *Sunset Boulevard*, Evelyn Mulwray and Noah Cross from *Chinatown*, and so on — and their previously unknown pasts and futures snag and pull at each other in this web, implying an invisible world occupied by the ragged stories of every fictional identity ever invented.

A similar process of dragging icons and overlaying them, sliced translucently thin, onto fictional histories, has been one of the key devices of technological music. Feasibly, you could extrapolate a novel from the interweaving stories buried within John Cage's *Variations IV*, but richer possibilities unfolded in the early 80s when the Memphis born trumpet player Jon Hassell began to capture, loop and laminate fragments of sampled sound on albums such as *Aka-Darban-Java*.

Hassell has now formalised that process by naming his current band Bluescreen after the cinematic technique of filming foreground shots against a blue background and then superimposing them onto new landscapes and backdrops. Hassell says he is "adopting this metaphor in musical ways, creating magical textures in sound, making something familiar sound fresh and exotic by separating it from its background and combining it with something new and startling." Finding a review of David Thomson's *Suspects* in the *LA Weekly*, he hit on this as another metaphor connecting to his own search for a music which is almost psychotropic in its capacity to activate alien worlds in the imagination through strange juxtapositions.

Previous Hassell albums, particularly *Earthquake Island* (Tomato, 1978), *Vernal Equinox* (Lovely Music, 1977), *Possible Musics* (Editions EG, 1980) and *Dream Theory In Malaya* (Editions EG, 1981), along with his collaborations with Gnawa musicians from Morocco and the Farafina percussionists from Burkina Faso, were made in the spirit of creative anthropology exemplified earlier in this century by the Surrealist writer, traveller, critic and documenter of dreams, Michel Leiris. Writing on ethnographic Surrealism in *The Predicament Of Culture*, James Clifford offers an outline of the territory. "I am using the term *Surrealism* in an obviously expanded sense to circumscribe an aesthetic that values fragments, curious collections, unexpected juxtapositions — that work to provoke the manifestations of extraordinary realities drawn from the domains of the erotic, the exotic and the unconscious."

That could be a précis of Jon Hassell's œuvre. But with *Aka-Darban-Java* (Editions EG, 1983) the perfume of ethnopoetics was supplemented by parallels with literature and the advanced technology of hyperreality, indicated through affinities with Latin American Magic Realist writing and the video technique of Keying In. As for the sound, sluggish shapes undulated in the depths of a liquid fog formed from particles of air passed through metal > electronic transformations > the pitches of an Indian raga played on a treated trumpet > slowly turning variations of a drum cycle from Senegal recorded in Paris > glittering spirals of noise lifted from gamelan music and an Yma Sumac record (already a repository of colonial myths) orchestrated in Hollywood Exotica style by Les Baxter.

This was a form of music, Hassell suggested, which would leave behind "the ascetic face which Eurocentric tradition has come to associate with serious expression." Taboos were transgressed, notably in the music's sensuality and its free use of source material, but this was not untutored montage. The raga — Darbari — can be heard in its traditional form as interpreted by one of Hassell's teachers, the great Kirana style vocalist Pandit Pran Nath, recorded by Alan Douglas in New Delhi and released 18 years later on *Ragas Of Morning And Night* (Gramavision, 1986). *(Continued on page 40)*



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“Every record I’ve done has been some sort of erotic fantasy.”



Jon Hassell *Continued from page 36*

Though he is now hampered by age and Parkinson’s Disease, Pran Nath’s approach to teaching was once formidable. “It is necessary to remain one hundred years with the guru, then practice for one hundred years, and then you can sing for one hundred years,” he has said. The last time Hassell and I talked in interview mode, back in 1989, Jon tugged and worried at the contradiction between lengthy (though not quite *thot* lengthy) study and the instantaneity of Xerox culture.

“It’s a quandary for me,” he said, “because I did develop a physical dexterity when I studied Indian music with Pandit Pran Nath. I decided at that point I wanted to walk into a room and have something that was in my nervous system which I could activate and bring with me wherever I went. It’s a problem to know what to do with that in the age of sampling and audio sleight of hand, because the audience is looking for the final result, basically. They don’t care if it took you 20 years to arrive at it or whether somebody sampled it off of a record and used it.”

At the time we spoke, he had just released *City Works Of Fiction*, an album produced with a lot of digital editing and a strong influence from Hank Shocklee’s Bomb Squad productions for Public Enemy. Although this might have been seen as another straightforward case of stealing black music innovations, Shocklee had claimed in an interview that the Public Enemy sound was partially influenced by Eno and Byrne’s *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*. And that album, Hassell now reveals, his hurt soothed by the passage of time, was an idea spirited away from conversations between himself, Eno and Byrne, only to resurface as a project which eliminated him and his vital influence. “I’ve thought about sampling *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*,” he says, “and re-releasing it as mine.”

So where to go at the beginning of the 90s? There was some speculation about Jon recording an album of untreated solo trumpet. But after a long delay, during which time *City* has set an industry standard for digitally sliced soundtracks of the delirious metropolis, the new album, *Dressing For Pleasure*, is as far from the naked intimacy of a solo acoustic trumpet as Tromso is from Bandung.

Which is virtually no distance at all, in fact, in the wired world. Across the record’s 12 tracks there is naked intimacy, or should I say provocatively dressed nakedness, but this is absorbed into the associated imagery of the music rather than the instrumentation. As the title indicates, this is a further stage in the move away from ascetic aesthetics, into HipHop, jazz, ragga and the ritualised sex of the modern primitive movement. This time, the taboos transgressed could be spelt Taboo, which might have been (at some point from the late 50s to the mid-60s) the name formerly scripted in pink neon above the door of an establishment now known as “Club Zombie” (track five on *Dressing For Pleasure*).

Maybe, at this point, somebody is asking who this man Hassell is and what is the relevance of sex clubs to sampling and ancient Indian ragas? Almost all of the musicians I meet at the moment seem to regard Jon Hassell, particularly the harmonized, digitally delayed trumpeter of *Power Spot* (1986), *The Surgeon Of The Nightsky Restores Dead Things By The Power Of Sound* (1987), the Editions EG releases (*Possible Musics*, *Dream Theory In Moloyo*, *Ako-Darbon-Jovo*) and *City* (1990), as one of the godlike geniuses of contemporary music. As Japanese bass player and composer Motohiko Hamase wrote for the sleeve notes to his *Technodrome* album, “*City* provides a thorough expression of city music in one of the most remarkable accomplishments of recent years.” And suddenly, as if it had been dropped into the culture yesterday afternoon, a growing number of critics use Jon’s Fourth World concept to underpin their explications of modern/primitive hybrids. “Jon,” sighs Thrash of The Orb, whose *Pomme Fritz* album owes a certain debt to Hassell’s back catalogue. “Geezer. What’s he like then? How old is he?”

What’s he like? What do you think a person is like when his life has interconnected with Stockhausen, Terry Riley, LaMonte Young, Pandit Pran Nath and Brian Eno? Broader than somebody who has sat in front of an Atari screen for two years and then made their first record. As for

how old according to Pran Nath's reckoning, about 250 Whatever the real age, by the lamentable standards of the pop media, he's in the great-grandfather bracket, which is ridiculous

When you listen to *Dressing For Pleasure*, no matter how you judge the music (and opinions on this new album seem sharply divided so far) you can put it on the shelf next to Jeru The Damaaja, DJ Krush, Public Enemy's *Muse Sick-N-Hour-Mess-Age*, Scanner, Tricky, UNKLE/Howie B's "The Time Has Come" on the Mo Wax label, Wu-Tang Clan, The Beastie Boys, Gappa G & Hypa Hypa's "Information Centre" from Jungle central, and hear a connecting thread which has little to do with age or geography Maybe that thread sounds like the snapping of connections into a million pieces, but all these examples are mounting a sonic assault on musical fundamentalism

Jon has some interesting observations on fundamentalism, pertinent to the tensions between nationalism and trans-globalism Click yourself on to the Internet, for instance, and you can find electronic discussion sites devoted to heraldry and folk dancing "Maybe it will become convenient to redraw a map of the world according to interests and who wants to live in which era," he says from his home in West Hollywood as we talk on the telephone "We could have wars between the 15th century and the 21st century"

The subject of fundamentalism has arisen as we talk about the sexual themes of *Dressing For Pleasure* I've already heard one person say they thought the album's packaging was sexist It's certainly a lot less dangerous to package your music in cosmic circuit diagram fantasies than with blurred, barely recognisable erotic snapshots, but then Hassell's ideas have always courted danger The kind of Fourth World sampling he has employed and its post-colonial implications raises issues that are by no means resolved yet, similarly, to exteriorise private sex fantasies for public consumption is to step into one of the most fiercely contested zones of the moment

But these are giant steps — not always in predictable directions — away from that compartmentalised ascetic aesthetic in which the body, feeling and intellect are strangers Piling on slightly too many helpful clues, on *Dressing For Pleasure* Jon is making links between HipHop and the Gil Evans orchestrations for *Birth Of The Cool*, perhaps tracing, in his own mind, a web of meaning from Robert Farris Thompson's explorations of West African culture and mystic coolness ("a sense of certainty"), or the alchemical black heat of Miles Davis melting in transfixing contact with the white harmonies of Gil Evans

"In the past," he says, "having been coming from the abstract, instrumental side of things, music was metalanguage for performing I always felt that music took off where words stopped HipHop changed that, because it allowed a new relationship between words and music, one that I felt more comfortable with At the same time, every record I've ever done has always been some sort of a fantasy, an erotic fantasy They've always been in this same constellation of sensuality, where the Gil Evans sound equals this sense of feeling good at a certain place at a certain time — maybe post-orgasmic music as opposed to pre-orgasmic

"I keep asking the central question what is it I really like? What is it that I really want to hear? And both in the personal realm, the sex fantasy realm, and the musical realm, it comes down to shockingly simple things I love lush sensual atmospheres I love beautiful chords I'm in love with harmony Strangely enough, I've taken the path of disciplines which didn't have a lot to do with that — at least in the sense of traditional chord changes, like studying raga Although there are vast harmonic implications It is, in fact, very covertly harmonic, but I'm talking about the beauty of having one note and you've got these chords changing underneath Within each chord, that note takes on a different kind of character It's a different picture each time, but using the same foreground Brazilian pop music seemed to pick up on that right away — "One Note Samba", etc

"Why did Brazilians choose this, or why did Gil Evans choose those harmonies out of the repertoire that existed at that point? There is something going on there, some deep essential drive towards the beautiful The beautiful is defined here as being that which drags you most profoundly without any abstract constructs Without talking yourself into what's beautiful"

At the heart of our emergent sense of beauty in the present is a new tonality, which Jon sees as a development of samples being detuned and overlaid, particularly in HipHop, to create dense, strange harmonic dissonances To people who don't insist that music must be Eurocentrically in tune, these are very pleasurable, but to those whose first and formative listening experiences are HipHop, this new tonality is normal

Could rejection in 'academic' circles of this gorgeous delirium of wrong notes and weird chords come from a similar source to denial of the buried unconscious material that generates fantasies? "Flowers are the sexual organs of plants," says Hassell, extrapolating outwards again "There's a whole host of natural phenomena around that suggest that we're fools not to enjoy decorating our lives in a way that turns us on and makes us happy Because this is the root of spiritual healing, of feeling good about yourself, and the ability to decorate and to be creative with one's life I find all these things incredibly positive In my own life I've been operating that way privately all along I feel like it's time to start saying something about it now because I see it as one of the root causes of this terrible situation we're in here now, the situation of hypocrisy on the public level and the vast difference between public and private forms of behaviour"

In the UK, where Tory MPs are particularly skilled in seduction and arcane masturbation rites, this is a subject we know only too well Jon sends me an essay from *Skin Two* (Issue 14), written by Pat Califia and entitled "Sex Magic Modern Primitives, Latex Shamans And Ritual SM" "Modern primitives live, for the most part, in urban enclaves in the age of the machine," she writes "We have to find a way to synthesise the rhythms of nature with our electronic lives A fuzzy-headed, sentimental longing for a bucolic utopia will not save us from toxic waste or nuclear weapons We need a world where we can have both computers and campfires" In condemning misguided appropriations of pre-industrial, communal ritual for the post-industrial, private theatre of sex, this brilliant essay illuminates some of the murkier areas of Fourth World theory

And in *Dressing For Pleasure*, there are musical developments of the Fourth World idea, also "Destination Bakiff", for example, samples and chops snatches of Duke Ellington's recording of "Bakiff" Composed by the Puerto Rican trombonist Juan Tizol, the tune is a heady piece of exotica "When Ellington and Strayhorn composed the *Far East Suite* in 1964," wrote Mark Tucker in his sleeve notes for *Duke Ellington The Blanton-Webster Band*, the 1986 CD box set of Ellington recordings from the 1940s, "they may have been inspired by their recent visit to the Orient, but surely they drew upon memories of Juan Tizol's earlier studies in musical exotica, among them "Caravan", "Pyramid" and the atmospheric "Bakiff" Tizol's Puerto Rican origins seem to have little to do with a piece like "Bakiff", where musical impressionism is the product of its composer's imagination, not his first-hand experience with indigenous Caribbean idioms"

In the Fourth World, nothing is simple □

Dressing For Pleasure *is available now on WEA import*



In this month's books section: sounding off from Cage to Clinton, plus new studies of Muzak, Robert Wyatt and gay imagery in pop

Extended Play: Sounding Off From John Cage To Dr Funkenstein

By John Corbett

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS (PBK £16.95)

An energetic and sympathetic proponent of a wide variety of modern musics, John Corbett has here collected here his writings for *The Wire*, *Down Beat* and *New Art Examiner*. Celebrations of working musicians jostle with academic Freudiana (gender roles in lead and background vocals), post-structuralism (a discussion of Jacques Attali and the thesis of Noise) and interviews (fully transcribed where original reports were presumably constrained by space).

The theoretical section is best. Corbett is thinking hard, his scope is much wider — and more discerning — than most academic cultural theory. Whether or not the music sells, he talks about the stuff that matters. When he explains how commodification of sound represses the playing body — and cites ECM production values as an example — theory and critique complement each other perfectly. His analysis of REM as "corporate avant garde" and his history of anti-censorship strategies (right back to the middle ages!) are striking and original.

Not all the theory is so useful: the chapter on postmodernism is merely low-grade institutional babble (such seemingly obligatory chunks of theorising are already starting to look dated, like those on Althusser and ideology in 70s academic writing). Despite being packed with insights, the theoretical essays are in danger of looking like exercises in various modes of academic discourse (anti-totalising or just plain incoherent?). Corbett suggests we use the index to peruse the book like a CD player "on shuffle mode", which sounds like an excuse for a lack of a central argument. Oh, the speed of postmodern life, it doesn't give us time to think things through any more. But it does give us time to publish (and buy) books.

A shame, too, that the theory doesn't ingest all the reportage — phrases that sound fine in a magazine can read somewhat lamely in a book (news of the "telecommunications grass-roots global groove" of the London Musicians' Collective, for example, or Mark Sanders finding "sensible points of entry for his engaging drumwork"). The interview about performance and repetition with Derek Bailey is terrific (spiky, historically sussed and very funny), the technical expositions (Jon Rose, Nicolas Collins, Evan Parker) less so — you wish Corbett would interrupt these rather self-serious monologues with the social questions that spark debate elsewhere. Where Corbett is proselytizing for musicians who share his language and his concerns (the downtown New York avant garde and the LMC), you begin to suspect that the music may not in fact be so marvellous, that its importance is theoretic rather than palpable.

Musicians who come from a different perspective than Improv/avant garde provide the best interviews. Here there are genuine political/aesthetic problems to chew on: the idea of history shared by Alton Abraham and Sun Ra, for example, or Lee Perry's ravings (madness or political poetry?), or George Clinton on rap, misogyny and drugs. Clinton's words are some of the wisest and most suggestive that have appeared in print on those vexed topics: crucial stuff.

Disappointingly, then, Corbett hasn't used his evident facility with ideas to fix some of the swarm of argument that trawls through magazines like *The Wire* (the way, for example, Ronald Radano argues for the centrality of margins in his brilliant book on Anthony Braxton, *New Musical Figurations*). Instead, Corbett tantalizes us with 100 pages of (various) theories and then 200 pages of music news. Still, for anyone unfamiliar with the wacky world of *The Wire* the book will come as a revelation. Corbett has honed in on some of the most intriguing music happening today and his discussion is never less than lively, intelligent and politically concerned.

BEN WATSON

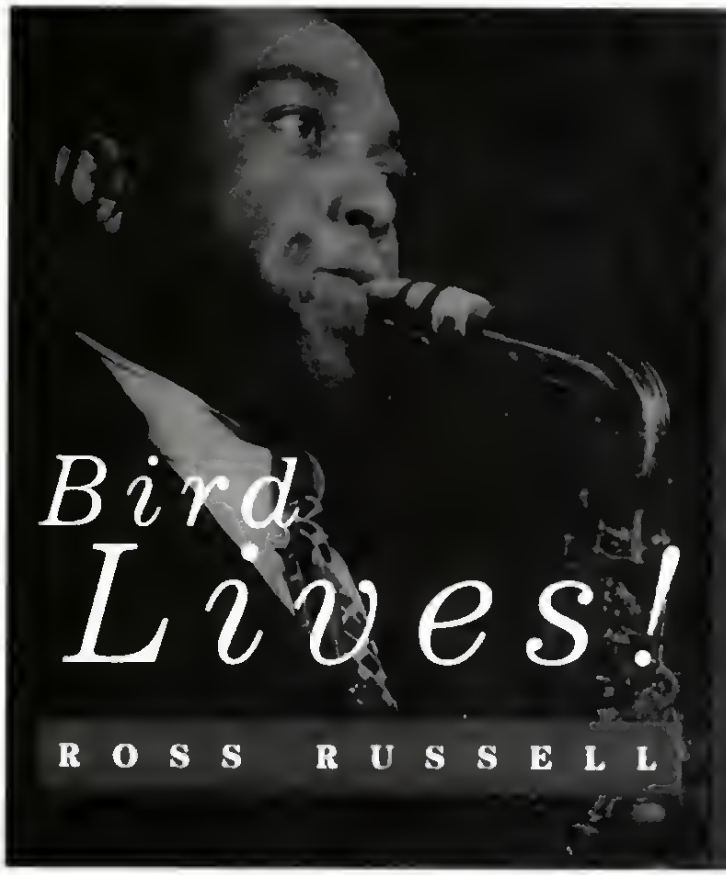
Elevator Music: A Surreal History Of Muzak, Easy Listening And Other Moodsong

By Joseph Lanza

ST MARTIN'S PRESS (HBK £17.95)

"When will someone stand up and tell the truth about all this Ambient nonsense?" pleaded reader Stewart J Tray in *The Wire* 124. "It's just Lawrence Welk for the 90s."

And finally that truth has arrived on a platter for Mr Tray, wrapped in the handsome jacket of *Elevator Music*. Whether he will feel vindicated by Joseph Lanza's thesis is another matter. *(Continued on page 44)*



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QUARTET ENCOUNTERS

Print Run *Continued from page 42*

The text — overt or sub — of most British popular music criticism is based on a sliding scale of validity Radical resistance, usually symbolised by noise, rage, shock, angst and fragmentation, takes top marks while the bourgeois passivity of easily digested, unobtrusive mood music, symbolised by the Muzak Corporation, is ranked for its cultural worth alongside Tupperware, driving gloves and bowling greens

Lanza, who has written previously about theme parks and the films of Nicholas Roeg, inverts this judgment Mood guns oozing death-dealing irony, he strikes back with an argument which elevates easy listening from basement to penthouse "The vast quantity of uncharitable jokes and condescending anecdotes directed against elevator music in general and Muzak in particular, betrays a lack of understanding about music's augmented role in a media-dominated culture," he writes "Muzak and mood music are, in many respects, aesthetically superior to all other musical forms they emit music the way the 20th century is equipped to receive it."

If what follows does not live up to this disconcerting opening, the problem lies, to some extent, with the size of Lanza's task Attempting to make sense of music ranging from Mantovani and Ray Conniff to Devo and Eno, his text is peppered with stimulating elaborations on this theme of mood music as an expression of our century's romance with modernity, simulacra and the perfect future

Many of the sleeve notes he quotes are eye-wateringly gorgeous, full of Sci-fi ravings about "pleasure ports phallic festivals of the Orient electro-whiz slumber parties the vaulted grandeur of cathedrals, concert halls and shopping malls " But Lanza has to document some dull history and pedestrian biographies in between his more inspired interpretations of Muzak as Surrealist eroto-exotica for the extruded plastic age

The relentless wisecracks suggest that he identifies with the baby boomer cult of Space Age Bachelor Pad Music and Exotica as documented in Re/Search's *Incredibly Strange Music Volume One*, but his irony is inconsistent Does he *really* think that the *Mystic Moods* albums influenced Pink Floyd? Stick with it through the hiccups, however, and *Elevator Music* is a rich source of bizarre images (Muzak playing in the deserted American Embassy after the fall of Saigon, for example) Psychological darkness has been colonised into pap, Lanza argues Now mood music can "enchant us with exaggerated dreamscapes of order and happiness " Now that's what I call radical

DAVID TOOP

Wrong Movements — A Robert Wyatt History

By Michael King

SAF PUBLISHING (PBK £14 95)

The biographer's art is not to be sneezed at, but in terms of music biogs, nothing really beats the approach used here — a scrapbook full of contemporaneous cuttings and photos plus exhaustive details of gigs and recording sessions King deftly pastes over any continuity cracks in the source material with linking passages written by himself and quotes and anecdotes from Wyatt and a number of friends and musicians Their comments are pithy and — considering what state they were probably in all those years ago — their memory of minutiae is remarkable Some critical evaluation of Wyatt's music by the author would have been welcome though, especially as there are no album reviews included here to put a perspective on Wyatt's recorded output

English music in the late 60s, especially the post-psychedelic Canterbury scene, was noted for its whimsy, but there's no fey nostalgia here The quotes flesh out the rites of passage of a number of idealistic young men who went from cultural 'relevance' to middle aged obscurity — and of course they tell of Wyatt's personal tragedy when he broke his back in 1973 If Wyatt ever indulges in self pity, it never shows "I see the accident now as being a sort of neat division line between my adolescence and the rest of my life," he says And whereas his nascent left wing views were laced with irony in 1969 — "I'm not a revolutionary at all I'm really a homebody, an average middle class *bourgeois*" — the tone became a lot more serious by the mid-70s "It was immensely conceited and ridiculous of a generation of people from the 60s to think that just by singing protest songs they could make the world better I started to become more interested in serious revolutionay activity, by which I mean revolutionary activity that changes power "

The most moving section in this fascinating pile of information is the rallying round of Wyatt's friends after his accident Pink Floyd and The Soft Machine played benefits for him and there was no shortage of musicians cajoling, even forcing him back into solo and collaborative creativity At the other end of the book's wide spectrum, the Swingin' 60s photos of The Soft Machine in London and France are priceless Wyatt's comments on the group and its milieu are particularly illuminating "We felt like suburban fakes dressed up on Saturday and visiting the city I never dared take LSD I was in total awe of the audience at UFO, people like the Oz crowd We used to come in the train and pretend we were like them " And even here, beyond the oil wheels and psychedelic togs, reality intrudes King realises it all looks a bit too beautiful now and is at pains to point out in the introduction that, "Personal, musical and managerial struggles were rife during the 60s and 70s, a period for which Robert holds little or no nostalgia " It's a pity we can't say the same for the majority of his contemporaries

DAVE MORRISON

Rock On The Wild Side

By Wayne Studer

LEYLAND PUBLICATIONS (PBK NO PRICE)

From the obscure, frequently plain filthy, sexual talk of jazz, bebop and R&B, through the excesses and flirtations with bisexuality of the 70s, to disco and now 'Queercore', popular music has always been a little bit queer As pop is about shock and revolt as well as fun, that's hardly surprising So a study of gay imagery, lyrics and icons in music sounds like a great idea

Unfortunately, this book can't decide what it is — a serious analysis of the gay contribution to music, of homophobia and the possibility of pop music to change people's prejudices, or just another 'Is he or isn't he?' list Sadly, it comes closest to the latter, the (American) author seems obsessed with song lyrics that may or may not allude to an artist's sexual preferences, veiled references to famous folk and suchlike

Occasionally, the book reveals something worthwhile and provocative, even if it's only to remind us how revolutionary — and truly subversive — The Kinks once were, or how Frank Zappa's offensive lyrics undermine his saintly standing among *Late Show* types But too often, the soundbite-sized chunks of text surrounding each selected song tell us nothing new or, more to the point, nothing interesting

Perhaps most cloying of all is the author's generous admission of a host of strange celebs into his Gay Hall Of Fame While it is kinda strange to note that Garth Brooks is responsible for one of the few Country songs to celebrate sexual freedom ("We Shall Be Free"), it's typical of this book's style that it avoids asking any of the fascinating questions surrounding the sexual politics of Country & Western And given that rap and Country are the two racially opposite sides of the same blue collar, storytelling coin, there are surely parallels to be drawn here Instead, we get a "Thank you, Garth" homily that wouldn't be out of place at an Oscars ceremony

What is conspicuously lacking here is any form of analysis This is made all the more irritating because Studer is constantly on the verge of making a telling point For instance, he suggests that the infamous 'disco sucks' backlash had less to do with the music than with its original gay constituency, and asks just how coincidental was the use of the word 'sucks' Such observations highlight the fact that there's a great book to be written about this subject This isn't it

DAVID LUBICH

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Il Giornale della Musica

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multimedia watch

Mark Espiner clicks away at the interface between music and interactive media.

He's seen the future and claims that it works. Prince, now ☥, has made his first foray into the world of multimedia by releasing a CD-ROM entitled *Interoctive*. Claiming to be "not so much a game as an opportunity to explore", *Interactive* (pictured right) is the artist's attempt to let you into his secret world.

It seems that more and more star musicians have some crazy desire to let you into their secret worlds. Peter Gabriel's *Xplora* informed his audience of the breadth of his work and interests from Womad to Amnesty International, including a tour of his Realworld recording complex. For ☥ (easier to type than it is to say), it is neither real nor secret, but fantasy.

So how does this fantasy future work? From a straightforward insert-the-CD approach, very easily. You can enjoy the music of *Interactive* on any audio CD player and the interactive bits can be accessed on either Macintosh or PC from the same disc (although the hardware demand is quite high and it insists on loading in systems to drive the game which are sometimes inferior to what is already on the machine).

The game-plan goes like this: you are piloting a space ship whose video console, after playing the song "Interactive", flashes "malfunction" and "emergency" as you crash land close to a purple building with a phallic tower. The building's architecture is based on the shape of the ☥, with different rooms including foyer, studio, music club, hallway virtual video lounge, boudoir and so on. In each of these rooms is a hidden jewel which is a section of the ☥ symbol/building. Collect them all and you get back to your space ship to transport ☥ to his next tour as well as seeing a preview of an unreleased video.

As the king of kitsch, the decor of his palace is more Athena nightmare than fantasy dream house, although there are plenty of the tasteless trappings of mega-success: the boudoir's bed descends by remote control into the love pit, video coffee tables display talking heads of Eric Clapton and Bootsy Collins saying things like "you never seem to get a middle ground with this guy: you either love him or you hate him" and "he *is* that positive nuisance right now", secret safes full of bondage gear, an occult candlelit shrine with a morphing ☥ face — need I say more?

The pluses if you are a ☥ fan are huge — lots of trivia, live footage, full length videos of "Diamonds And Pearls" and "Gett Off" and plenty of innuendo through sexy bodies imploring you to "touch me", "come play with me" or simply "come". You can obtain the ☥ font from the program as well — a bonus for those Internet surfers who are passing round Princey info on *alt. music. prince*, but have to refer to him as '0+>'. If you like playing heuristic games like *Myst* you should like it too, but do we really need another mixing desk just to turn the drums up and down — or a karaoke version of "Kiss"?

Beyond this fantasy dream world, Philips are also trying to find a real place for their CD-i consoles.

Their new strategy has meant redesigning them to appeal to male games players in their late teens and early twenties, developing games specifically for CD-i and releasing live performances of Tina Turner, The Cure and others as non-interactive, high definition video compact discs, all of which would seem to leave a question mark over the development of future music interactive titles.

August sees a couple of interesting music related multimedia installations in London. *Now You See It...* is a ten-day event at The South Bank (3-12 August) featuring new collaborations of musicians and artists from around the world. Multimedia has found a way there in a satellite event called *Now You CD-ROM It*. Alongside the sculpture *101 Chairs* curated by Sebastian Bergne, ARTEC are to present the e-City Cafe. Acting as a CD-ROM jukebox and featuring titles by David Bowie, Peter Gabriel and ☥, the five stand-alone cafe consoles will also be access points for the Internet. In addition, artists involved in the event will launch Midi sound files through the keyboard provided onto the worldwide web, and users around the world are meant to download, manipulate and send them back, making it a morphing, musical chain-letter. In addition to this there will be an interactive information delivery system on the festival events produced by David Hurren from Studio 2WO and Rob Bevan. Fronted with a circular touch-screen monitor revealing text, video and graphics it will provide a stunning visual guide to what should be a unique event. With no entry fee nor specialist knowledge required, this is multimedia for anyone.

Interactive is available initially at HMV and ☥'s NPG store at 21 Chalk Form Road only, and at all music and computer stores from August.







soundcheck

August winners:
The Art Ensemble Of Chicago, Public Enemy, *Isolationism*

In soundcheck:
Bark Psychosis, Bikini Kill, Bootsy Collins, Charles Bukowski, John Cale & Terry Riley, Don Cherry, Dub Syndicate, The Fugs, Hendrix, Keith Hudson, Killing Joke, Ellis Marsalis, Milton Nascimento, Orang, Stockhausen, Sugarhill and more.

In brief:
Japanese racketeers and a mountain of new jazz

In outline:
All strains of HipHop, some Techno horror, and trawling the global sound archives



PHOTO: GERT DE RUYTER

Roscoe Mitchell: Ensemble player

WIRE WINNER

state of the art

The Art Ensemble 1967/68

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It was entirely appropriate that The Art Ensemble Of Chicago should have begun life under the name The Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble (the change came about by accident when a French promoter advertised a June 69 Paris concert by the group using the former name). It was Mitchell who was responsible for the first, breathtaking and icon shattering document of Chicago's Association For The Advancement Of Creative Musicians (AACM, of which The Art Ensemble were 'members') — the 1966 Delmark release, *Sound*, attributed to The Roscoe Mitchell Sextet and produced by a young fan of the music, Chuck Nessa. Though he would combine various musicians for specific concerts of tonal — and frequently theatrical — exploration under the name of The Roscoe Mitchell Art Ensemble, by mid-67 the group had solidified with Mitchell on multiple reeds, Lester Bowie on trumpet, bassist Malachi Favors and drummer Phillip Wilson.

The earliest evidence of this quartet, taped by Terry Martin in a friend's basement during rehearsals, is like a film of Edison's laboratory as he invented the light bulb. The feel of what Martin termed "the excitement of the search" is palpable, the four are questioning every conceivable musical parameter, creating a new language with its own inherent drama, humour, form. There's precious little here that's recognizable from any known tradition — even playing a blues, Mitchell's "Old", they open spaces into the changes and fill them with Bowie's pungent trumpet cries and Wilson's sly demeanour. Two versions of a group improvisation called "Quartet" reveal their true breakthrough — finding ways in which individual statements can relate as an ensemble music, not in the sense of late Coltrane/Ayler polyphony, but from another angle, concentrating on a broader range of emotions which define the music's structure. To this end, the quartet's colours and dynamics are stunning (Wilson was the perfect drummer, all nuance and intently focused gestures), and the proportions of what would become The AEC's improvisational fluidity are already in place.

After a series of crucial recordings, all for the local Delmark label, by Mitchell, AACM-paterfamilias Muhal Richard Abrams, Anthony Braxton, and Joseph Jarman, blues loving Delmark owner Bob Koester pulled back his support, and Nessa saw the need to start his own label, to keep the music coming. The first Nessa LP was Lester Bowie's *Numbers 1 & 2*. Wilson had joined Paul Butterfield's Blues Band, so the drummerless trio, improvising around a Mitchell concept, provided their own typically unconventional percussion: shaken cardboard, combs, scratchers and ratchets, heightening the humour with weird vocal interjections, harmonica and slide-whistle. With

the addition of Jarman's reeds for the next session two weeks later, the music continued to evolve the reeds combine empathetically and the available colours are increased Listening here to the newly released alternate takes of "Number 1" and "Number 2" it's obvious that, under Mitchell's initial guidance, the four achieved an amazing unity of purpose Multi-sectional and intricate in design, the group improvisations cohere around quickness and appropriateness of response, as incongruous sounds and extremes of timbre blend subtly or clash vehemently, suggesting layers of irony and dramatic immediacy, so that one hears the spontaneous relationship of parts as a new attitude of composition

Jarman was leading his own robust group at this time, and another of Martin's invaluable basement tapes show the two groups combining into a sextet of scrambling polyphony airier than Ayler, but able to draw upon his precedent, transmuting a theme among the instruments Without Jarman, a second Nessa studio session was issued as *Congliptious* (a blend of conglomerate and conniptious, perhaps?) contrasting wry a cappella solos from Favors, Mitchell and Bowie with an ensemble piece (including, for the sole occasion, drummer Robert Crowder) that refines Mitchell's premise of constantly changing textures (A pair of brief pieces, one a boogaloo, intended as 7" singles but unreleased, serve as a postscript to this date)

By releasing this five CD box set, Chuck Nessa deserves our gratitude for his care in making this music available to us in such pristine condition (I only wish he had included the original liner notes, as well as more thorough new essays, in the accompanying booklet) The alternate takes help clear up certain misunderstandings about The AEC's origins and methodology The Nessa LPs (the third combined the "Old" and "Quartet" basement tapes but was not released until 1975) were not experiments in free jazz, as some critics thought, but conscientious attempts to structure spontaneity inspired by, primarily, Roscoe Mitchell's varied compositional strategies The group rehearsed themes *and* improvisations meticulously in an environment of inquiry and free expression, and, notwithstanding their individual instrumental talents, theirs was, unequivocably, an ensemble music The results remain shocking and satisfying today How remarkable to consider that these achievements were not an end in themselves, and that, as The Art Ensemble Of Chicago, the show was only beginning

ART LANGE

WIRE WINNER

PE lessons

Public Enemy
Muse Sick-N-Hour-Mess-Age

DEF JAM DEF JAM 1 CD/MC/2LP

The temptation with the new, formidable Public Enemy album is to make a divide between sound and words Their sound is as impressive as it has ever been dense, jarring, but also more fluid, more hybrid Yet if the sound hits you all ways, less complex are some of the lyrics which sustain notions of race essentialism or offer prescriptions on how best to behave Perhaps, as a white Briton, it's not my affair Chuck D has sometimes described PE as an alternative source of information for black Americans What's more, perhaps in the American context of an apparent, still felt need to counter 'negative' black images, more noteworthy might be how *un*-didactic, how loose PE are Contrast, say, the latest, beseeching Arrested Development album, *Zingalamaduni*

"If you don't stond for something, you'll foll for anything," a sampled voice declares at the outset We get a mock cinema trailer Public Enemy are coming to *"clean up the scene"* What follows — to continue PE's movie analogy — is a thriller-cum-state of the nation piece in which PE reveal themselves as too self-aware to simply play righteous saviours The album's centrepiece, "Bedlam", has Flavour Flav cackling, in sinister nursery rhyme style, *"The world don't work on more, no more"* The



famed 'vertical' Bomb Squad production, where a track's dynamic comes from the play between the layers of sound as well as from 'horizontal' progression, conjures up an overloaded 13 minute dystopia

PE are more 'live' than ever before because of a greater use of 'traditional' instruments The sound now more readily accommodates 'softer' textures There are choruses of children and female backing vocals on some tracks, including a great 'superfly' backing to "I Ain't Madd At All", Flavor Flav's funky response to a common assumption The presence of jesting, jagged Flav is the surest way PE skip the traps they themselves set If Chuck D's raps sometimes make him seem too much the responsible father figure, lucid clown Flav incites PE's restive sound, still less interested in system building than in messing things up

ROBERT YATES

WIRE WINNER

the quiet storm

Various Artists
Isolationism: A Brief History Of Ambient Volume Four

VIRGIN AMBT 4 2CO

Isolationism is the term compiler Kevin Martin coined (in this magazine) for those groups and individuals whose music is governed by a profound respect for the silences too easily encroached on in the overcrowded culture of pop, Ambient, Techno and so on

The silence of the Isolationist artists signals a reluctance, a mark of disgust, an invisible sign of their refusal to participate, especially in relation to the endless soma of an Ambient slumber party into which some would consign them That they soil the silence at all is partly a desire to camouflage the entrance to the holes of the selves into which they withdraw More valuably, the act of sifting near-silence for the means to express numbness and void has produced an astounding diversity of methods, sounds and variations that completely explode the standard, bland and narrowing musical and emotional definitions of Ambient

Aptly enough for a music that renews itself through its near-extinction, *Isolationism*'s imagery and themes are mostly post-apocalyptic In other incarnations, many of the 23 participants on this double CD have immersed themselves in the noise and fury of disaster Here, their almost religious resignation before the inevitable manifests itself as the aural equivalent of dust settling on that disaster

British post-noise apocalyptics such as Final (Godflesh's Justin Broadrick), Scorn and Lull (Mick Harris), Robert Hampson's Main, Zoviet France and the looped, depth charge dubscapes of K Martin's Ice and Techno Animal projects form one loose axis, the shredded nerve guitar improvisations of Jim O'Rourke, Japan's KK Null and Iceland's Raoul Bjorkenheim form another The spaces in between are mapped out by musics as various as AMM's skull-scraping improvisation, the mildly brooding, John Carpenteresque disco *noir* of Disco Inferno, and the wholly Other radiances of Paul Schütze, Seefeel, Orang and Sonic Boom's EAR (a splendid personal vindication of this reluctant guitarist's decision to sit out at least three UK psychedelic revivals for a context worth getting out of bed for)

Isolationism's disappointments are few but somehow significant Aphex Twin's superficially appealing impersonation of NON ultimately leaves you wishing he'd start finishing off a few of his interesting designs on a new kind of electronic Ambient, and the environmental sound sculptures of David Toop and Max Eastley ironically need their own spaces to work their spell properly

To conclude with two personal favourites Japanese singer/guitarist Keiji Haino's Nijiumu provides a group setting for the various shades of abstraction through which he exorcises his blues, and Thomas Köner's "Kamom" brings music as close to silence as it can get without extinguishing itself altogether *Isolationism* signals that this way out is the only way forward

BIBA KOPF







Voiceprint: PO Box 5, Derwentside, County Durham DH9 7HR

NMC: through Complete

JMT: through Polygram

Ecstatic Peace: Forced Exposure, PO Box 9102, Waltham, MA 02254-9192 USA

Third Stone, Wiiija: through Vital

Kill Rock Stars: through SRD

soundcheck

Daevid Allen Trio
Live 1963

VOICEPRINT VP122 CD

Did you know that Daevid Allen had a trio in 1963? I didn't. I always thought the Canterbury scene started with The Wilde Flowers (Voiceprint has some of their stuff in the pipeline, too) who later splintered into Caravan and the hugely influential Soft Machine Daevid Allen and Hugh Hopper's sleeve notes provide the background to the Trio and this early gig at London's Marquee Club, witnessed by a domestic tape recorder with one microphone Yes, very Lo-fi — but at least it survived However, Allen's pre-music announcements might make you wish it hadn't. (30 years later he berated himself for being "an arrogant self-satisfied egocentric prat".)

Allen and Hopper are joined by another whippersnapper, young Robert Wyatt on the drums, and for the ambitious Monk-influenced improvisation "Dear Old Benny Green Is A-Turning In His Grave" by a precocious (and just about audible) pianist called Mike Ratledge — certainly the most musically advanced at this stage Allen's spiky guitar playing is a touch boppish and hogs that one mic, Hopper has a walking bass figure, Wyatt's lessons with George Niedorf were starting to pay off The gig was mostly a vehicle for Allen's beat/Surrealist poetry, which is pretty hit 'n' miss, though "Ya Sunne WOT" crops up later on Gong's *Camembert Electrique* (1971) and there's an early version of "Fred The Fish And The Chip On His Shoulder" (see Allen's *Banana Moon*, 1975)

Canterbury eggheads will already know how important this creaky old recording is to the history of British progressive music, the unconverted should at least find it memorably eccentric, or better still the beginning of a fascinating journey

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Alexander Baillie & Andrew Ball
Wavesongs
NMC ARTISTS SERIES NMC D019 CD

NMC's new 'Artists Series' kicks off with an absorbing recital by leading modernists Alexander Baillie (cello), and Andrew Ball (piano) Ball's amazing virtuosity is well known, but Baillie is fairly new to me, and sounds equally phenomenal

The composers they feature are all in mid-career, with the exception of bright young hope Mark-Anthony Turnage, but the results are often surprising, confounding expectations The earliest piece is Michael Finnissy's *Doves Figary* from 1976, not much New Complexity slashing and grinding here, this is more like a monody In contrast, the less melodic pieces are those by Britten-inspired composers — Colin Matthews's *Three Enigmas* and *Wovesongs* by Gordon Crosse

Wovesongs begins in the depths, and slowly becomes more animated, passionate, finally ending in a kind of peace More wave-patterns than songs, perhaps, but a welcome return to disc by an underrated composer Alexander Goehr's *Sonato For Cello And Piano* and Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Sleep On* are the core of the recital Goehr's piece is a great late Romantic outpouring, extraordinary for him, with long singing lines

For the three lullabies of *Sleep On* , Turnage is forced to abandon his colourful orchestral writing in favour of an understated lyricism But he's an innate melodist, his lines pure and un-neurotic, and here unusually delicate Turnage is probably Britain's most promising young composer, his forthcoming NMC release will be one to look out for
ANDY HAMILTON

Bark Psychosis
Independency
THIRD STONE STONE 010 CD

Independency is a prequel to Bark Psychosis's recent LP *Hex* — a chronologically arranged trip from their earliest 45s to their recent 21 minute classic "Scum" I actually found it worked best if programmed in reverse start with the expansive lateral drift of "Scum" and work your way back It seems to make more sense like falling into a whirlpool at its widest point and spiralling down into a watery vanishing point Start with "Scum" (and the equally resonant "Tooled Up") and you start with them at some sort of apex and work back to basics (the Scum Total of their work, as it were)

"Scum" is a magisterial driftsong in a tradition which spans Can and The Orb a Grey Room for stationary nomads, a stoned navigation from song/chant to a passage of Grateful Dead-ish feedback of frightening beauty, to a climactic fusion of all modes together BP's use of found voices and samples is never gimmicky (ie no strident TV preachers or seashore wash), it's low key and consequently far more disturbing the oddest noise on the LP could be a child's toy

BP inhabit a world of stunted and scrambled *microwaves* of sound that is closer to Neu's "Hero" or Tangerine Dream's *Thief* soundtrack — jagged urban anomie — than would-be Ambient pastorale The idea of Ambient as a wave machine for living room chill out is all very well, but there comes a time when the difference between inner and outer realities — between household womb and inner city tomb — just gets too much to ignore, when, as Rab C Nesbitt might put it, the Scum also rises

Tracks like "Blood Rush", "ManMan" and "All Different Things" do possess an eerie beauty, but it's limned with a vaguely threatening spectral hum the sound of your disintegrating neighbourhead rather than the sound the sunrise made when you were stoned that time in Thailand

Bark Psychosis are fractured realists, their music like a sonic equivalent of the jerky Otherworld of surveillance film They use new technology to capture archaic, primordial motion It has a similar tone to novelist Iain Sinclair's East End simultaneously Victorian and new-millennial *Independency* is the real sound of summer in the city — where the hottest day of the year is also the most polluted of the decade, an urban riptide of detritus, deafening noise and overheard violence This is Ambient's Alarm Call
IAN PENMAN

Django Bates
Autumn Fires (And Green Shoots)
JMT 514 014 CD

I won't deny that in the past I've had a problem with Django Bates There was always a ruthless flashiness about his pianism that, rather like Courtney Pine's saxophone playing, seemed to sacrifice meaningful communication for mind boggling display But unlike Pine, Bates's party piece presentation wasn't concerned with torrential speed, his virtuosity was of the brain, not the body, aiming to show not how many notes he could play but how many styles and genres he could quote in the space of one solo A kind of postmodern Keith Emerson, if you like

That was then, but *Autumn Fires (And Green Shoots)* is very now in every sense of the word, it's a superb set which makes the above criticisms absolutely redundant It's a solo piano collection which at last sees the multifarious strands of Bates's formidable musical vocabulary becoming a coherent and individual idiomatic whole as opposed to a vehicle for over elaborated clever-cleverness

This is pianistic dynamite, harmonically bold yet rendered immediately accessible by dint of nothing more than sheer brio Bates also unveils a hitherto unheard fondness for percussive, triple-forte truculence, the thundering left hand eruptions in a transfigured version of "Autumn Leaves" reminiscent of a Valdes, a Beirach or a Tyner And that's just for starters Elsewhere, the metronomic "Ralf's Trip" gallops along with fabulously infectious abandon, and "Jetty" is a shimmering and sensuous original delivered with serene panache and knowing but unmannered Debussyan overtones And then there's ah, what the hell, suffice it to say Bates wastes scarcely a nanosecond of this compelling album and if there's any justice Blue Note, GRP and the entire cosmology of US corporate jazz will have their A&R men and their chequebooks camped out on this guy's doorstep ASAP
PAUL STUMP

Bikini Kill
The Tape Version Of The First Two Records
KILL ROCK STARS NO NUMBER MC

Free Kitten
Unboxed
WIIIJA WU 36 CD

Guv'ner
Hard For Messy For You
ECSTATIC PEACE/FORCED EXPOSURE E45 CD

Heavens To Betsy
Calculated
KILL ROCK STARS KRS 222 LP

"Transforming history into herstory, challenging dull, restrictive conceptions of difference Transforming noise friction into a precise beat critique The scum always rises to the surface on days like these ..." (Huggy Bear single sleeve notes, back from ages past)

Intelligence and rage and no route out for either perhaps it has been a long time coming, but the strange thing was always that R**t G***l took so long to fashion itself out of — boyrock? Oh wake up Rockboys have all wanted to be women since Elvis they mostly just don't do it very well Time for the experts to take over

The abiding spirit at the (re)birthplace of rock, as the Kill Rock Stars label calls itself, is Poly Styrene, which is right and proper (if 'right' and 'proper' are words we can still rely on) Heavens To Betsy and Bikini Kill can turn on Poly's unnerving witch-muezzin yammer if they want, Free Kitten cover "Oh! Bondage! Up Yours!" (with excellent incoherent trumpet instead of Lora Logic on sax) and have done with it Guv'ner take more of a lead, as singers, from Mo Tucker singing "After Hours"

Kitten are ultra-sardonic, coldly angry rather than out of control Naive guitar playing, you could say (meaning it in the Denardo Coleman-at-twelve sense), letting the rock's remoulding be done by random plasma vortices of amp distortion A fraction of Pussy

Galore (Julia "Hello, I hate your fucking guts" Cafritz) meets a fraction of Sonic Youth (Kim "Artforum" Gordon) over sloppy re-garaged Zeppelin and/or Germs riffs (with side-helpings of half-formed or forming or unforming versions of dimly recognisable Cro-Magnon rock classics: women shall be cavemen too). As rigorous as the first series of *Ren & Stimpy*.

Bikini Kill you really should already know intimately: if not, this tape collection will get you up to speed on their 91-92 releases. Essential live cut "Thurston Hearts The Who", with Kathleen reading a lengthy anti-Kill review, while the others nearly loosen up into a sentimental anthem. Nearly.

Guv'ner's relatively angsty mildness in such company — their release being the work of neither seen-it-all disgusted avant grandmothers nor the totality-for-bug-eyed-little-misses — doesn't altogether make them today's Red House Painters by default. A twosome, half male, their CD starts with a song called "Drummer Want-Ad", which is exactly that, complete with their address, and the shout *"We've got a drum machine, don't make us use it!"* But I sort of wish they had: they have a self-expressive 'acoustic Beefheart' aesthetic, even when they're amplified and distorted, which I can't bring myself to approve. (Plus, admittedly, a Neil Young-ish side to them, which I can't help but like...)

Heavens To Betsy: another duo, electric guitar and drums, correctly gender-segregated, wearing their unforgiving opinions tattooed on their faces. So, more than Kill (whose musicianship is pretty rough and ready) and more than Kitten (whose politics are very jaded), they can work through the real tension that drives Cause rock: seduction (as in shaped volume, directed distortion, hooky tunes and Nirvana's trick with quiet verse and screamed chorus) versus absolute refusal of this or that socially conformist error (the usual suspects: racism, sexism, consumerism...). Of course, the pleasures of volume and distortion and tune and Nirvana are materialist (not to say objective) facts in music, however im'proper'. And gender, for example, isn't it's







Ryko: through Pinnacle

Polar Bear: through These

Rhino: through Warners

just one of those daft habits "Restrictive conceptions of difference", indeed.

What sets them apart? Mostly, the elegiac tone they somehow give the ripped edges of the noise they love to make, reminiscent of the communiques Bernardine Dohrn wrote for the Weather Underground. *"Do you wonno live this teenage dream/The punk white privilege scene ?"* Their sleeve has a medical diagram of a heart on it, and *Calculated* ends *"The knife will go deep, the knife will go inside "*

The powers that be at *The Wire* want me to explain why Riot Grrrl hasn't 'happened' yet, why punk, if it came back at all last year, came back as lame boystuff. Well, go figure. Riot Grrrl required a jump in the dark, and nothing made it apparent that that jump was in a winning direction. It misfired because (a) it never engaged with the mass media, (b) it peaked in the mini-media first, (c) the Courtney 'n' Kurt story derailed it, (d) Joan Jett is still hanging fire on her own personal boygirl revolution, (e) it isn't a fashion, just to hit and pass, it's a wound inflicted in spite of itself. *"The knife will go deep, the knife will go inside "*

HOPEY GLASS

Blackstreet
Blackstreet
INTERSCOPE 6544 92531 CD/MC

Swingbeat, in case you hadn't noticed, is the name for 90s R&B. It's a rumbustious merger of HipHop and soul that is almost wholly the invention of one man: Teddy Riley, a music maker whose grasp of the interplay between beats, melodies and vocals has enabled him to create some of the most irresistible dance music of the last five years and earns him comparisons with super producer Quincy Jones.

For a few years (say, 1989-92) Riley pioneered and carried Swingbeat alone. Old time soul producers were uneasy about letting brash rap music stomp its heavy boots all over their silky programming. Only recently have musicians emerged (Dr Dre, Joe, Jodeci) who can challenge Riley's mid-tempo hegemony.

Blackstreet is Riley's personal project (he's one of four lead vocalists) — a supposed summation of his previous work and perhaps a statement to his contemporaries as to who's really got the talent. Within are the usual tricks. Fractured samples act as instruments, deep basslines loom in and out of the mix like stealthy submarines, bright keyboards skip out incisive melodies while wondrous voices fight the rough backings for aural supremacy.

One of Riley's (ergo Swingbeat's) greatest innovations has been to appropriate the riffs from rap's latest hits and wedge them under soulful vocals. This gives a potentially saccharine genre a dramatic edge and, in the days when being perceived as 'street' is so necessary to commercial success, keeps it hip. *Blockstreet* is split equally between dynamic club tunes and slow emotive ballads. The central thrust of the album is the immediate need for relief from sexual frustration. A certain depth is gained by meddling with seminal black dance tracks. The Zapp Band's "Computer Love" is closely reproduced (though the words are different), the lyrics of George Clinton's "Atomic Dog" are enthusiastically chanted out in one song, and clips from other soul standards pop up throughout the record.

This album aims for a broad market. In the past, Riley has put out records of mesmerising abstraction, where a beat, a bass and a sample thump away in perfect syncopation and create a surreal and minimalist atmosphere that's the perfect counterpoint to impassioned singing (his remix of SWV's "I'm So Into You" is the best example, Michael Jackson's "Do You Remember" is also good). On *Blockstreet* the tracks are full-bodied and rich with instrumentation. There are no gaps.

JAKE BARNES

Bootsy's New Rubber Band
Blasters Of The Universe
RYKO RCD/RAC 90307 2CD

My second-user copy of 1978's *Bootsy?* album lacks the cardboard star-shaped Bootsy shades you

could pop out of the sleeve and wear. This gap in my range of gentleman's accessories was never to be filled. Bootsy, however, is still kitted out with numerous sets of splendid spectacles reprising the star theme. No surprises then that his new band is essentially the old one — Maceo, brother Phelps "Catfish" Collins, Bernie Worrell ... all the usual suspects are here and they all appeared on his first solo outing, *Stretchin' Out*, in 1976.

Blasters is dedicated to the late guitarist Eddie Hazel, whose acid-fuelled wah-wah helped make early Funkadelic (particularly *Maggot Brain*) such a subversive collision of both black and white popular sounds. The music here is a set of amiable space bass grooves largely deriving from the hectic bubblegum that blasted the whole crew into stardom and other cosmic zones when the acid rock approach was ditched in the mid-70s. Combined with this is a retro-funk feel which reaches back beyond Funkadelic to R&B and Bootsy's first real gig, with "Sex Machine" vintage James Brown. There's even a gospel number. Less in evidence is the baroque Sci-fi kitsch of the fully-fledged Parliament and, disappointingly, there's nothing of the quintessential 90s weirdness which Bootsy produced with erratic reprobate Buckethead on the recent Bill Laswell-directed *Zillatron*.

One thing that makes the music from the Mothership era unsettling is that it is at once so far off the wall and so far from taking itself seriously. By the time we get to *Blasters* the music is discomfiting only in its familiarity. Bootsy's playing is better than ever and there's a certain nostalgic buzz to hearing all this recycled so well, but in the end, inevitably perhaps, the album doesn't doesn't live up to expectations. And, yes, just like the old days, there's a dreadful ballad track.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Mark Browne
The Bathos
POLAR BEAR 007 MC

Adam Bohman
Solo
POLAR BEAR 006 MC

Conspiracy/Mark Sanders
Gorilla
POLAR BEAR 003 MC

Mark Browne, the English alto and soprano saxophonist, is pushing 30 and not as well known as he should be. *The Bathos*, his first solo album, will hopefully rectify this situation. Although Evan Parker and Lol Coxhill are among his favourite improvisors, his generally restrained use of multiphonics and other extended techniques is more reminiscent of another great British saxophonist, John Butcher. Browne's four solo improvisations relate strongly to their recording locations, which include a small greenhouse in Middlesex and woodland opposite his home in Wiltshire, the former's phrasing is notably clipped and edgy, the latter imaginatively juxtaposes busy phrases with silences and held notes which gently fragment and merge with surrounding birdsong or distant traffic. This is a fascinating and purposeful debut.

"Only musicians are interested in a presentation of pure sounds. People still like *playing*," says composer/improvisor Martin Archer. And he's mostly right — tiny audiences attest to it. Adam Bohman is the sort of uncompromising musician Archer has in mind: one who loves the immediacy and perplexity of sounds produced from objects or 'instruments' most people regard as non-musical or plain junk — eg Oxo Tin and Spring, Brandy Box Guitar. *Solo* is also his solo debut, it demands patience, close attention and, of course, the abandonment of conventional attitudes to what constitutes 'playing', if it is to be appreciated in all its liberating, multi-layered, textural complexity.

You can also hear Bohman on Conspiracy's third release, sounding like somebody munching glass into a microphone. After the shorter statements on the earlier *Intravenous*, *Gorilla* comprises four improvisations all over 15 minutes. The group's main achievement here is their cohesive marrying of vestigial free jazz elements such as John Telfer's semi-lyrical saxophony and Mark Sanders's rhythmically-inclined percussion, to the detailed, atonal landscaping of Bohman's prepared strings, Andy Hammond's brittle electric guitars and Nick Couldry's keyboards. A rare achievement indeed, and typical of the highly individual work the Polar Bear label is concerned to promote.

CHRIS BLACKFORD

Charles Bukowski
Hostage
RHINO WORD BEAT R2 71758 CD

"Tonight is going to be a very dignified reading. I will not rejoin or have rejoinders with the audience. I shall read dignified poetry in a dignified way. We shall comport ourselves as ladies and gentlemen of culture." Each of these statements is greeted with laughter during this 1980 reading by Charles Bukowski at The Sweetwater club in Redondo Beach, California (long circulated as a private tape and now released on Rhino's new spoken word imprint).

Such responses were inevitable perhaps, for the late Bukowski cultivated a tough-guy image as a brawling, hard-drinking poet with no time to waste on niceties. He quickly breaks all those promises, however, as, drinking non-stop, he emerges in all his confrontational glory, and there are definitely Bukowski fans for whom his between-poem challenges to the audience (interspersed with belches, reminders that he's carrying a knife, is tougher than men half his age, and so on) are the main attractions.

It's almost enough to overshadow most poetry, but not his. Though the poems aren't listed, he's at least formal enough to give each title just before launching into 17 scruffy depictions of racetracks, Toulouse Lautrec, Catullus, farting and the like. Ironically, his measured reading style really does invest his work with a cocksure dignity, even on "The Secret Of My Endurance", where he claims that the secret is in having *"a young boy to write my stuff now. I keep him in a ten-foot square cage with a typewriter, feed him whiskey and raw whores, belt-buckle him pretty good three or four times a week. I'm 60 years old now, and the critics say my stuff is getting better than ever."*

STEVE HOLTJE

John Cale & Terry Riley
Church Of Anthrax
COLUMBIA IMPORT 474 604 CD

Today, postmodernists all, we pride ourselves on ignoring genre boundaries, but in the late 60s there was a refreshing readiness to reach out to other audiences, and many 'jazz' and 'classical' musicians were willing to undertake missions to the rock masses, from Charles Lloyd and Miles Davis to Stockhausen and Cage. In almost all crossovers a fascination with Eastern sounds, musical procedures and systems of thought was the common element. Terry Riley had been mining that vein for most of his career.

In 1971, when this album was first released, Riley's music had a harder edge. Minimalism was more innovative, less commercial and, I think, still unnamed. The Velvet Underground had not yet become a retro-cult, and was far less influential than now. At the time, I was intrigued by the juxtaposition of two seemingly unlikely bedfellows. The four instrumental pieces, credited to Cale and Riley jointly and containing a substantial degree of improvisation, seemed a genuine fusion of both men's ideas, though they would fit comfortably enough in Riley's canon. It was, presumably, Cale who tempted Riley into creating at least the illusion of movement through time and of melodic shapes which (almost) develop and resolve.

Over the years I've tended to neglect (what was) side one in favour of the more assertive pleasures on the reverse. Cale's song "The Soul Of Patrick Lee" is an unexpectedly lyrical interlude before "The Ides Of March", always my favourite track. Sounding like two ham-fisted pub pianists attempting a cutting contest between last orders and drinking-up time, Cale and Riley pound chords and jab notes from their rattling keyboards for 11 minutes of glorious commotion. The album winds up with "The Protege", a casual variation on a fragment of

"Ides" recalled at chucking-out time and rudely truncated after a mere two minutes 46 seconds by some electronic shrilling. Of course, we've already hit the repeat button: an ominous, distant drone, a rhythmic bass ostinato, hesitant percussion, and a chiming harpsichord lead into the gauche organ theme of "Anthrax". The remaining track, "The Hall Of Mirrors In The Palace Of Versailles", is a haunting, almost ruminative piece, despite more churning piano chords.

This CD reissue clarifies a lot of detail in the layers of sound, but detail is irrelevant. Riley (using piano, organ and soprano saxophone) and Cale (playing bass, harpsichord, piano, viola and organ) aimed for an overall effect, and achieved it mesmerically.

BARRY WITHERDEN

Don Cherry
Dona Nostra
ECM 521 727 CD

Dennis Gonzalez Band Of Nordic Wizards
Welcome To Us
GOWI 1 CD

Don Cherry's appearance at last year's Warsaw Jazz Jamboree suggested a man not only seriously jet- and culture-lagged (despite classic performances in Poland previously), but also no longer a serious contender. *Dona Nostra* was already in the can by that stage, and one can only wonder what went wrong in the meantime. The trumpeter's first entry, on the second track "Fort Cherry", has exactly the bugling sharpness we've always looked to him for (with Ornette Coleman, with Gato Barbieri, on his own stuff) and his stabs of sound on Ornette's "Race Face", which had sounded like a chaotic dirge in Warsaw, are razor sharp.

It isn't really a Cherry record, though. The strike rate is disconcertingly reminiscent of Miles's first painful comeback gigs. Much of the emphasis falls on the European band, Lennart Aberg on saxophones, Okay Temiz's tuneful percussion, Bobo Stenson's lyrical piano lines, Anders Jormin solid on bass, the latter pair had functioned magnificently behind Tomasz Stanko at Jamboree 93, but they're not called on for the same flowing lines on this, and Stenson for one is slightly wasted.

'Dallasorleanssippi' trumpeter Dennis Gonzalez has regularly added other notches to his complex geographical by-line, London on the cheerful *Catechism* record, and now 'Warslo' (Warsaw/Oslo) on *Welcome To Us*. Released on a small Polish label, but recorded in Norway with an excellent Scandinavian band he calls The Nordic Wizards, it confirms the mystical strain that is gradually overtaking the rootsier side of Gonzalez's musical personality. Stanko's floatingly abstract ballads might almost be an influence here. The overall tone is a muted gentleness. Perhaps too much is made of singer Sidsel Endresen's mid-Atlantic enunciation on the spoken texts, but the additional material — Asian percussion, a choir of refugee Afghani children — is not intrusive, and Manfred Eicher's production is dirt-free and crystalline.

Just like Cherry on *Dona Nostra*, Gonzalez cedes much of the responsibility to his band. Nils Petter Molvaer is almost a musical twin and does a lot of the straight trumpet playing. Pianist Bugge Wesseltoft spends much of his time shading and overdoes the pastels, but it's difficult to fault him for not being Bobo Stenson, who now has his own utterly individual spectrum.

BRIAN MORTON







Zia Mohiuddin Dagar
Raga Shuddha Todi
NIMBUS NI 5402 CD

Ghulam Mustafa Khan
Raga Bilashkani Todi
NIMBUS NI 5409 CD

Upalappu Srinivas
Rama Sreerama
REAL WORLD CDRW 39 CD

Three albums by top-flight Indian classical players, all recorded in Britain, and each one evidence of the Indian improvisor's ability to renew the tradition in his or her own way.

I knew about the Vina, as a seriously twangy, low pitched, long necked lute from South India. What I didn't realise is that in North India they have the Bin, which has an enormous calabash gourd on either end and is even twangier. If you've been searching for a deep round twang that goes on and on and almost off the end of the scale, then ZM Dagar's album is for you. Dagar recorded this 70 minute raga in May 1990, only five months before his death. He represented one of the last links back to the old Hindustani 'dhrupad' tradition, the major classical genre of the 15th to 19th centuries. At the same time he was an innovator who devoted his life to refining the Bin as an instrument and reviving its practice — by the 20th century the Bin was out of fashion.

Playing without a plectrum, Dagar makes use of a long sustain and an enormous variety of timbres. Each of these bendy excursions is an exquisitely crafted phrase, repaying careful attention. And Dagar has all the time in the world — the Alap introduction alone lasts nearly 35 minutes. No drums here, but once he makes his move there are long rhythmic passages of melody that reminded me a little of New Order bass lines.

GM Khan sings in the 'khyal' vocal genre, a more flexible and modern tradition than Dagar's 'dhrupad'. He is accompanied by fairly minimal tabla, plus a big rich drone of two tamburas, harmonium and zither. His singing is not for the fainthearted — first he reaches deep down to the bottom of his vocal range, then seems to drift off into an introspective trance. Eventually he emerges into the light of his voice's upper octave to tell us what he saw down there in the dark. In a series of bizarre rapid melodic figures, Khan seems to be shaking his head to see if it will come off his neck. It's easy to forget how strange Indian vocal improvising can be.

Upalappu Srinivas, here recorded very beautifully at Peter Gabriel's Real World studio, is one of Indian music's youngest stars. Now 25, he was hailed as a genius at 13 in India. But, the press release hastens to assure us, he has not bought leather trousers and gold earrings. He travels to concerts with his father and a suitcase full of

ECM: through New Note

Nimbus: through Nimbus

Real World: through Virgin

ReR: through These, Recommended

Dedicated, Harthouse, Sentrax: through RTM/Pinnacle

Gowi: Ul. Mikolhaska 9, 31-027 Krakow, Poland

gods, and plays the ragas of the southern Carnatic tradition on a five string mandolin. The plucking style is clean with no chords, like an African guitar. Sweeter than a banjo, more energetic than a slide guitar, Srinivas's playing has a bright electric tone, nicely set against a husky-throated violin. Together with a mridangam drummer the group scamper cheerfully through their melodies, working tightly as a rhythmic unit. Never mind the leather trousers. I can see the future of Indian music, and it involves U Srinivas turning up his amp and playing his mandolin through a RAT fuzz pedal.

CLIVE BELL

The (EC) Nudes
Vanishing Point

RER RER N1 CD

5uu's
Hunger Teeth

RER 5UU1 CD

The (EC) Nudes have a name of spectacular silliness, but this, the latest of drummer Chris Cutler's collaborations, is an accessible, highly original musical unit. Cutler's redoubtable, octopoidal playing underpins Wadi Gysi's guitar which veers from delicate picking to cranked-up explosive note flurries at a moment's notice. Amy Deno is equally adept at blowing mangled sax lines and squeezing out a tune on the accordion. She plays bass and sings too — moody and melodic, with spectacular ululations on "Yippee", and belting it out with full force on the Latin influenced "Salvatore".

The band's eclectic approach is forged into a distinctive, balanced style. "Opening" has an upbeat rock 'n' reel buoyancy and "Axis" a circling rhythmic base, and the more overtly dynamic "The 1003rd Tale Of Sheherazade" shifts around with the angle of attack subtly changing and developing as acoustic guitars are overlaid by ear-strafing electric lines.

New bass player Bob Kerman's first introduction to the band was when they presented him with the recordings to mix. Hopefully his inclusion won't bring in too many influences from his own band 5uu's. Also featuring Robert Drake — from the excellent Hail — on vocals and various instrumental duties, they overbalance where The (EC) Nudes keep their influences in check. 5uu's are original by dint of sheer overload. *Hunger's Teeth* is rife with the sort of rambling, obtuse vocal lines that characterised Henry Cow and The Art Bears but sung in rather geeky, smug harmonies, undercut by some cool cross-rhythms but also plenty of irritating overtly Zappa-esque fiddly unison passages on keyboards and tuned percussion. The hi-tech gloss gives it the sort of garish, carnivalesque sound of David Vorhaus's White Noise project back in the pre-sampler, pre-synth late 60s, but without its wayward humour. And casting a long shadow over proceedings is the cloud of ye olde Prog rock. "Equus" has a promising start with the sound of footsteps crunching on gravel forming the rhythmic framework to Susanne Lewis's (also from Hail) vocal lines. It's OK until the band kick in with keyboard-led jiggery-pokery sounding disturbingly like ELP gone avant garde. 5uu's *are* doing something different, but how many will want to emulate them?

DAVE MORRISON

Global Communication
76:14

DEDICATED DED 014 CD

Alter Ego
Alter Ego

HARTHOUSE HA 6 CD/LP

Paul Schütze
The Surgery Of Touch

SENTRAX SNPX 175 CD

Global Communication are the duo behind Reload, whose *A Collection Of Short Stories* was one of the highlights of last year. With a track listing paying homage to languages as diverse as "Hebrew", "Japanese" and "Morsecode" you might expect a similar level of invention from this current incarnation. Wrong. Content to ape the trademarks of existing idioms (ie that branch of Ambient which exists as one long electronic hush), their microchip mimicry layers folk rhythms over lunar landscapes, doing little more than reflect back our caricature visions of these exotic, alien territories. File under urban muzak.

Alter Ego are another pseudonym in action. Better known as Acid Jesus, Roman Flugel and Jorn Elling-Wuttke make an incongruous pair, one being a classically trained pianist and jazz drummer, his partner a noise guitarist. In Alter Ego they hang up their differences, uniting in the experimental reaches of Techno.

Beside the supple nuances of electronic music's infinite range of sounds, language shrinks to a collection of boulders, a primitive set of useless symbols bound up with rules and national boundaries. Alter Ego approach this problematic relationship by constructing language as a comic book macrocosm. They set their graffitied trail against an Ambient soul skyline, but like some neon peepshow, the airy expanses slowly peel away, offering glimpses of a "Nude Resting", "Chinese Eyes" and an "Underwater Girl".

Reshuffling his name back to normal after a brief appearance as Uzect Plaush on the R&S album *More Beautiful Human Life*, Paul Schutze is an Australian whose music reflects language at its other microcosmic extreme. Where *Alter Ego* contains music as a series of pictures, *The Surgery Of Touch* exudes a continuous stream of textures and impressions. Schutze takes Lacan's idea that the subconscious resembles a language in structure and turns this notion on its head, producing a musical vocabulary of dreams, full of strange beauty and half formed yearnings.

The cast list of sound fragments is extensive. But although it features a huge range of instruments in addition to chanting, radio waves, cicadas and battle effects, the overall impression is of an orchestral windchime.

As senses go, touch has always been poorly served by language, ignored by a culture saturated in images of colour and sound. Perhaps with Paul Schütze's help it's time to redress the balance.

SUSAN MASTERS

Jimi Hendrix
Woodstock

POLYDOR 523 384 CD

Hendrix's Woodstock set, released here in full for the first time, has become something of a historical document. If the counter-culture had seen fit to mark its reign with a time capsule, the performance — headlining act of the definitive hippyfest — would surely have got in.

Given this historical weight, what's most remarkable about the performance is how contingent it was. Hendrix had disbanded The Experience, although at Woodstock his new group, Gypsies, Suns & Rainbows, included Mitch Mitchell as well as Billy Cox and Buddy Miles, and was in the process of putting together material.

The set itself is better described as a jam (Hendrix, in affable mood, says as much himself). Or working things out in front of half a million people. Of course, Hendrix performances are not known for ever being 'straight' and one man's jam is another's improvisation. As is often the case, it's difficult to complain about the resulting excess, while wanting to hold onto the richness. The two come as a team. For instance, on *Woodstock*, "Voodoo Chile (Slight Return)/Stepping Stone" (for completists: one of four previously unreleased versions or tracks here) digresses into beautifully concise phrases.

At the time of Woodstock, Hendrix was moving away from psychedelia back towards the blues, a move made explicit on "Hear My Train A-Comin'". It's always good to be reminded how well Hendrix could use voice and guitar *together*, and "Hear My Train A-Comin'" captures his voice as both langourous and exact, setting up a one-man call and response routine with the more abrasive guitar.

The Woodstock number most often replayed is Hendrix's version of "The Star Spangled Banner". Again, the contingency is felt. Before beginning to play, Hendrix offers the lovely disclaimer, "You can leave now if you want, we're just jamming." The result is still one

of the cutest — especially given American reverence for these things — ways yet devised of saying that you belonged and yet were spectacularly different

ROBERT YATES

Christopher Hobbs
Satie: Le Fils Des Étoiles
LONDON HALL OOCU 1 CD

ZNR
Barricade 3
RER ZNR1 CO

What better way for a new classical label to open its account than with a world premiere Satie's *Le Fils Des Étoiles*, a three act drama for solo piano, has lain dormant for over a century, although its three preludes (some three to four minutes each in length) have graced concert hall platforms in more recent times Hobbs's delivery is wonderfully even tempered, with a sense of understatement that's totally in sync with the deceptively empty-sounding harmonies that were Satie's forte It is cooly repetitive, although the juxtaposing of different blocks of music gives these seemingly familiar phrases a slightly different edge when they roll into earshot for another time The dramatic content is slight, never forced, while the whole is strangely bewitching It could easily pass Ambient music's litmus test like Eno's *Discreet Music*, *Le Fils* , with its spare, looping phrases, transports you into a world set slightly out of phase At just under 70 minutes, this is Satie working in long form, but it could be longer — try it with the CD player set to repeat mode

Satie's spectre also towers over the debut outing from the quirky French trio ZNR Originally released in 1977, *Barricade 3* offers 15 tasteful vignettes, an off-kilter brand of Palm Court music complete with crappy-sounding instruments including a piano that could have been on its last legs, a VCS3 synth that sounds like a cross between a Stylophone and a kid blowing raspberries, and those wretched beat boxes they built into Bontempi organs back in the early 70s Like the German band Faust, ZNR could be wonderfully droll and yet seemingly childlike, exacting experimentalists with an accessibility that was disarming Satie would have loved them

DAVID ILIC

Keith Hudson
Pick A Dub
BLOOD & FIRE BAF 003 CD

Creation Rebel
Historic Moments Volume One
ON-U SOUND 72 CO

Dub Syndicate
Classic Selection Volume Three
ON-U SOUND 69 CD

Originally recorded in 1974, Keith Hudson's *Pick A Dub* gets Jon Savage's vote (in the discography to *England's Dreaming*) for greatest dub album of all time Certainly it's up there with *King Tubby's Special* or Joe Gibbs's *African Dub Chapter Three* There's a glow, a spiritual halo, to this music that even the best of today's digi-dub and Ambient dub units can't get close to While the primitive two- or four-track recording and self-cobbled echo chambers used by Tubby, Hudson *et al* have a lot to do with mid-70s dub's blurry magic, another crucial factor is the pulsing presence of flesh and blood musicians inside the refractory, hall-of-mirrors vortex of the mixing desk. Classic dub involves the fusion of 'feel' (a live, interactive rhythm section) with the kind of disembodying, disorientating effects that anticipated today's digital, sampladelic music Rhythm is spatialised, so that it oscillates 'vertically' (within the soundscape) as well as 'horizontally' (through time) And so in "Black Heart", the chicken-scratch guitar doesn't just mark the after-beat, it leaps periodically out of its niche to buffet you about the face, while in "Dread Than", the rhythm guitar is a smeared *bloc* of sound, as sculptural as it's kinetic

Like psychedelia, or Ambient, dub is about nostalgia its Promised Land on the horizon is really the return of a lost golden age (Womb-time? When all sound reached us through the echo chamber of the mother's body?) Dub's repetition incarnates an abolition of Time, it prefigures the end of our exile in History Van Morrison was speaking the same inarticulate speech of the heart when he sang *"And it stoned me, just like going home"* But while Morrison expressed his homesick yearnings lyrically with his allegory of Caledonia, dub *depicts* Zion, using space and light All it takes, on *Pick A Dub* tracks like "Part One & Two Dubwise" and "Black Right", is reverbed, quicksilver hi-hat and cymbals to conjure up synaesthetic visions of a wombing, enfolding vastness It's a sensation of being at home in infinity that the philosopher Gaston Bachelard called "intimate immensity"

The tracks on *Historic Moments Volume One* are taken from 1977's *Dub From Creation* and 1978's *Rebel Vibrations*, albums that Creation Rebel recorded, with Adrian Sherwood at the controls, for his proto-On-U label Hit Run More technically advanced than *Pick A Dub*, but pre-digital, these tracks are even more disorientating in their mix of human touch and studio-warped 'virtuality' Dub's use of echo on the drums, so that each part of the kit is fed through a different acoustic ambience, turns rhythm into a labyrinth Stand out cuts on this splendid collection include "Vision Of Creation", with its ghost town piano and squeaky-bedspring drums, and "Rebel Rouser", where the rhythm is doubled with a quasi-military beat that gradually deliquesces into a vapour trail of reverberation

Some of the Rebels went on to play in Dub Syndicate Mostly consisting of unreleased or drastically revamped tracks, *Classic Selection Volume Three* dates from the late 80s This music's high-definition gloss and inelastic, programmed rhythms seems paradoxically more dated than Hudson or Creation Rebel Above all, despite the advances in recording technology, there seems to be *less* space in this dub than in Hudson's or Tubby's (who, like Can, achieved miracles with only two-track technology) Or at least, it's a different kind of space, more precise and geometric, less halcyon and exalted The difference between classic dub and digi-dub is like that between a stained glass window and a computer graphic.

Perhaps that spiritual aura is irretrievable, at least until contemporary dubsters renounce digital sequencers *et al* and turn Luddite, like US Lo-fi rock practitioners or Techno's analogue fetishists (Aphex Twin, µ-ziq *et al*) In the meantime, dub's legacy lives largest not with the purists and upholders of the faith, but as a rogue chromosome in other genres Saint Etienne's "London Belongs To Me", Aphex's "Analogue Bubblebath Three", Scorn's "Deliverance", drum 'n' bass Jungle Techno, to name a few

SIMON REYNOLDS

Killing Joke
Pandemonium
BUTTERFLY/BIG LIFE BFL 9 CO/MC/LP

Armageddon is a lucrative affair For proof, look no further than Killing Joke 15 years on from their first records and restored to a near original line up, their ninth album offers an obscene lyrical swagger through the usual collection of pantheist riddles and apocalyptic prophecies The soundtrack, though, has changed

Pandemonium is the band's missing link Lowering its boorish hulk into the gulf between East and West, it makes for a convincing bridge between Killing Joke, the sabre-toothed rock group, and their singer Jaz Coleman's outside interests in Egyptian musical forms The impressions of Cairo that spawned 1990's *Songs From The Victorious City* (a solo collaboration which paired Coleman with Art Of Noise's Anne Dudley) are revived here in the additional percussion and violin interwoven by Hossam Ramzy and Aboud Abdel Al The effect is awesome

Killing Joke's music has always borne a majestic blackness In the past, subliminal bass frequencies have even been slipped in to bolster the air of menace With *Pandemonium* this spirit lives on The guitars are still a dervish of abrasive noise given to random acts of violence and generally rampant Beautifully orchestrated harmonies still compete with a strong grasp of melody and the overall effect continues to be a tightly clenched meltdown of metal, thrash and industrialized funk

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seemingly set in the depths of night, their new release can only be described as a stumbling frogmarch through the glare of the noonday sun. There are some things our smug Western culture can't repackage in neat, consumer-friendly parcels and on *Pandemonium* the Eastern instruments dazzle and disorientate to dizzying effect.

SUSAN MASTERS

Labradford
Prazision
KRANKY KRANK 001 CD/LP

Motherhead Bug
Zambodia
POW WOW RECORDS PWO 7443 CD/LP

By jettisoning or supplementing the tools of the guitar, bass and drum trade, Labradford's arhythmic minimalism and Motherhead Bug's orchestral excesses may not revolutionise current American trends, but their non-conformity rejects the meat-market revisionism plaguing US Corporate Grunge. Maybe they're motivated by Jello Biafra's critique of post-Nirvana 'indie' rock, that it's the Great White Hope's conservative reply to the pan-cultural subversiveness epitomised by rap's populist muscle.

Labradford immediately melt down industrial serrations on their opening track, "Listening In Depth". *Prazision* confounds expectations by conjuring fragile songs from the deep flux of machine static. Occasionally following in the wake of Spacemen Three (eg "Soft Return") they chart undiscovered territory by constructing reverberating paeans to analogue hedonism. On "Prazision" itself, a conjunction of sturdy effects and Moog synthesizers is given free range to float by the absence of drums. Mark Nelson's vocal range veers from blissed-out consumptive to numb narrator. The surrounding sound hovers between an exhilarating high and a low end swamp, populated by indecipherable drones. This unresolved tension proves highly attractive, straddling both melody and noise on "Everlast", and capturing calm and turbulence on "Splash Down". Discovering this







Kranky, Pow Wow: through Cargo

Mo Wax: through Vital

Dorado: through Pinnacle/RTM

ITM: through Koch

New Tone: through Impetus

obscure duo's debut opens up a fresh route connecting Alien Pop's abstractions to the Isolationists' landscape of drones. Richmond, Virginia has provided an expansive answer to Grunge's small-mindedness.

In total musical contrast, Motherhead Bug (ex-collaborators with Foetus and Cop Shoot Cop) ply a kind of junkyard jazz rock. Composer/trombonist/vocalist/sharp dresser David Quimet is cosmetically attracted to the Jim Thirlwell brand of growling, bad-ass intimidation, but his passing likeness doesn't spoil an otherwise intoxicating record.

These pawnshop minstrels present demonic serenades for lowlife addicts. The undisputed star of this discordant debauchery is former Elvis sideman Jim Colarusso, whose shimmering trumpet solos are impeccably melodramatic. Steered by three drummers, the Bug beat remains nomadic enough to circumnavigate US rock's most congested waters.

K MARTIN

Love TKO
Head Turner
MO WAX/MAJOR FORCE WEST 001 CD/LP

Brooklyn Funk Essentials
Cool & Easy
DORADO DOR 022 CD

Love TKO, an outcrop of Japan's Major Force, operate on the outer margins of fusion. The ten tracks on *Head Turner* shift styles (from funk to spacey jazz rock, blues and even some post-Patti Smith beatnik poetry) in the way a hard driving motorist changes gear. The effect is to tug at the listener's ear and test their sonic balance: either you stay on board and enjoy riding the genre oscillations or you step off because you resent the discontinuity.

Alienation, isolation and fragile confidences sweep through the record, guiding the music's trajectory into fragmentation and spaced-out, blown-out, burnt-out ambience. Nihilism is a fine excuse for messing around with conventions, but although Love TKO snatch much of their style from America, Jamaica and the UK, they cannot disguise (nor do they try) their distinctively Japanese interest in stillness and reflection. This creates the incongruous event of a gritty funk jam breaking down into eerie chiming as the musicians conflate Oriental composure with low down R&B. Even in the 90s, location is still an influence on creation. No matter how many foreign sounds colour the musician's mind, hometown will still exert an influence, as Love TKO compellingly demonstrate.

The Brooklyn Funk Essentials (a large collection of mostly session players who play with the kind of naive exuberance that collectives seem to specialise in) push New York high up in the mix, hoping some of the city's excitement will rub off on their music. On *Cool & Easy*, the noise of an approaching subway train precedes the first track and from then on a conflicting set of moods and sounds are squeezed in, like passengers on a train, in fact.

It's all a rather gauche attempt to convey an impression of urban claustrophobia and life in the metropolis. Feelings of frustration and racial tension bubble alongside outbursts of jubilation. The signature lilts of the Caribbean and South America mingle with East Coast bop as a representation of New York's multi-ethnic population, and tinny, looped beats (courtesy of producer Arthur Baker) clank out rhythms for jazz poetry as a reminder of the city's radicalism. Out of these cultural clashes rises a patchy clutch of tracks that strive earnestly for new ground but end up pasting together old formulas.

JAKE BARNES

Radu Malfatti
Ohrkiste
ITM 950013 CD

Georg Graewe
Flavors, Fragments
ITM 950014 CD

Big bands have lost their lustre for improvisatory-minded contemporary composers, the more flexible chamber ensemble is now the unit of choice. Malfatti, a marvellously unconfined

trombonist with lots of free music experience, composes long, multi-sectional, slowly evolving environments of sound for 13 instruments: reed trio, brass quartet, string quartet, guitar and piano (note, no drums). His palette goes beyond microtonality, down to molecular pitches and sheer sound seeking a nucleus, areas that have interested Ligeti and Xenakis too.

The key to this music's dramatic coherence is that the musician's improvisational abilities extend beyond 'solos' into a fluent ensemble conception of acute attention and devotion to detail. In "Notes" the groove is an unaccented vibrational flow, with cloudy ensemble colours and textures, when actual notes do arrive, they seek to align into chords, melodies, interludes of tense activity. The smaller group combinations of "Graukanal" lend even more intimacy: the episodic shifts are unhurried and yet inevitable, and when they erupt into unison the effect is stunning. Much of the music exists under the surface, where small gestures carry more significance than do blustery filibusters. Lovely stuff.

In the ten piece GrubenKlang Orchester, some of the same personnel (violinist Phil Wachsmann, tubaist Melvyn Poore, Malfatti himself) bring their vivid techniques to Graewe's mobile-like scores, where there's more room for extemporization among the focused events. As the title suggests, the pieces alternate between *Flavors* (with expressionistic vocal parts and more open interaction) and *Fragments* (more formal delineation and concentrated melody). "Fragment 2", at 56 seconds, is a bracing perspective on post-Webernian construction — a gem of brevity, angular outline and movement. Other, longer pieces allow a discursive piano cadenza, sax and drum solos, even something approaching a blues cadence. Compared to Malfatti's hazy hovering tones, these have crisp, concise purpose, with explosive, albeit brief, points of emphasis. Both composers show that organised improvisation from committed participants can revitalize chamber music. It's New Music, still eloquent, still new.

ART LANGE

Ellis Marsalis
Whistle Stop
COLUMBIA 474555 CD

In the early 60s, pianist Ellis Marsalis struck out against his native New Orleans's indifference to modern jazz by opening a club called The Music Haven. In addition, he was part of a noble venture called The American Jazz Quartet, an adventurous unit whose members included clarinettist Alvin Battiste and drummer Ed Blackwell. In due time, The Music Haven shut its doors. Alvin Battiste turned to teaching to make a living. Ed Blackwell went off to Los Angeles to work with Ornette Coleman. And Marsalis, with a young family demanding three square meals a day, joined up with the Al Hirt organisation, playing "Java" all over the globe. 30 years later and Ellis Marsalis is credited as the father of contemporary jazz. Literally. Where would jazz be without his sons Wynton and Branford? Or his students Harry Connick Jr, Terence Blanchard and Kent Jordan?

Marsalis's new release is a look back at a 1963 album called *The Monkey Puzzle*, the sole effort of the gifted Ellis Marsalis Quartet. *Whistle Stop* covers five of the seven compositions on the original recording, in addition to compositions by Quartet members Marsalis, Alvin Battiste, Nat Perrillat and James Black. It is the five compositions by the late James Black, the quartet's drummer, that constitute a major discovery. Although producer Delfeayo Marsalis points out the complexities of Black's writing, the listener is struck by the originality and joy that Black brought to his music — something of a contradiction to the tragedy of a career spent in obscurity and marginality.

The group that Marsalis has put together does wonders for this music. His son Branford puts in a no-nonsense performance on tenor and soprano saxophones — one of his best on record. Bass player Robert Hurst and drummer Jeff Watts again demonstrate why they are considered the best rhythm section in 90s jazz — too bad they are in a form of cold storage in Branford's *Tonight Show* house band. Ellis Marsalis is a joy to listen to — he hits the right balance between harmonic complexity and laid-back swing. As he rarely tours — he is still something of a local treasure — this album offers an opportunity to hear him at full power.

My quibble is that there is too much full power here — 70 minutes of quartet music! Producer Delfeayo should have considered adding a guest musician or two (oh, Wynton!) to expand the palette of this fine date. Or maybe he should have taken his shiny trombone out of its case and paid homage to the endurance of his father and the legacy of James Black.

JOEL LEWIS

Margareth Menezes
Luz Dourada
VERVE WORLD 519 537 CD

Milton Nascimento
Angelus
WARNERS 945 499 CD

With bossa nova having been Western pop music's first real flirtation with what would later become known as 'World Music', it's bizarre that the subsequent 80s fetish for musical exotica largely ignored Brazil. Was it the memory of Carmen Miranda or what?

These two new CDs offer voluble witness to this bafflingly perverse situation. Both showcase Brazilian music's most marketable traits — PC ethnic earthiness, good-time rhythmic oomph and sumptuous melodic suaveness — yet, criminally, neither seem likely to arouse much interest here in the current climate.

The country's inexhaustible seam of pop divas has cast up another diamond in Margareth Menezes. *Luz Dourada* is a muscular miscegenation of hi-life, funk, reggae and Bahian street music, and despite the fact that Menezes's star status in Brazil means a characterless, corporate production straitjackets the sound, credit to her that so much residual energy remains. In fact, it's rather a shame that Menezes's smoky contralto isn't required to tackle a ballad or two, to give this hyperactive album a breather, if nothing else.

Exactly how Milton Nascimento, a modern Brazilian icon, hasn't enjoyed the kind of global plaudits heaped on the likes of Nusrat Khan or Fela Kuti by the Andy Kershaw tendency is symptomatic of the inexplicable commercial limbo into which Brazilian music has fallen outside South America. His exquisite and always original blending of folk atmospherics, MOR arrangements and unforgettable tunes make him one of pop's most distinguished practitioners. That said, *Angelus* is a pretty mediocre affair by his normally stratospheric standards, saturated with eco-hippy sentimentality and unusually ordinary songs. The participation of a surfeit of famous Nascimento acolytes doesn't help, Pat Metheny, Wayne Shorter and Herbie Hancock may have worked miracles for Nascimento before but it says a lot for the somnolent laziness of this music that it defies even their attempts at salvage. Peter Gabriel and James Taylor (hmm) are simply in the way, and only the high-altitude tones of Jon Anderson (yep, *that* Jon Anderson) seem a worthwhile addition.

But it's a testament to Nascimento's genius that even this could-do-better corpus will be bettered by few pop albums all year. And after 40-odd discs of fairly uninterrupted magic, the odd lapse is excusable.

PAUL STUMP

Ben Neill
Torchtower
NEW TONE NT 6723 CD

There are some sounds that I'm always very happy to hear on an album: helicopters, steam trains, pedal steel guitars and auctioneers. Ben Neill's *Torchtower* gets off to a promising start, his trumpet stabbing out rows of notes like a laser printer alongside the jabbering rap of an excited auctioneer. *"Three... 75, who'll bid*

a four? I got a five hundred dollar bill " Add a big rock drum kit and we're away, though after 15 minutes I felt the idea was a little overstretched

Ben Neill is a very precise trumpet player He has invented his own trumpet so he can play three trumpets and a bank of electronics all at once All five pieces here are his compositions, tossing baroque brass lines into a strictly controlled chaos of trombones, guitar, electronics and rock drums There's some chopped up speech from Nicolas Collins, tubular bells, even pedal steel guitar Four of the pieces are from a music theatre piece called *Downwind*, which deals with the biography of a German baroque trumpet virtuoso and environmental abuse in Ohio

So why does the whole thing feel rather opaque and unmoving? Neill lays his disparate musical elements alongside one another, but they fail to generate much atmosphere The heavy reliance on loud rock drumming means the scale is large and there's rarely any intimacy, and I suspect Neill is really an intimate player The best things I've heard of his were duets on Radio Three's *Mixing It* with Nic Collins Here his personality is hidden by his composing rather than being expressed by it Some of his ideas, for example pasting together baroque brass and House music, are dangerously close to the banal And probably the music theatre pieces really need to be seen as well as heard

CLIVE BELL

No-Man
Flowermouth
ONE LITTLE INDIAN TPLP 67 CD/MC/LP

Tim Bowness & Richard Barbieri
Flame
ONE LITTLE INDIAN TPLP 58 CD/MC

Mapping out musical terrains is becoming a deliciously difficult exercise, so why do it? Well, because frontiers — those semi-permeable membranes between states — can describe much about alignments, as, indeed, there is much to say about No-Man No-Man are vocalist Tim Bowness and multi-instrumentalist Steven Wilson, and just as their name implies, they make music that floats towards a place where core identities dissolve

The No-territory of Wilson's and Bowness's third album has recognisable frontier posts There are traces of Bowie, vintage Eno, a bit of Roxy "Angel Gets Caught In The Beauty Trap" and "You Grow More Beautiful" use lo-tech sequencer patterns reminiscent of Larry Heard, the album's airy, mannered arrangements nod towards The Beloved, guest guitarist Robert Fripp forays into terra nullia, and in doing so, conjures up memories that stretch past *No Pussyfooting* and back to his King Crimson days

It's tempting to describe *Flowermouth* as the ultimate summer album There is a glorious spring water clarity about Bowness's vocals, while Ben Coleman, the duo's violinist and unofficial third man, adds a quality of nostalgia and half-grasped memories That *Flowermouth* contains nine love songs addressed to no one only increases its odd familiarity

In a larger sense, No-Man represent an intelligent stab at the future, an attempt to enrich current Ambient work by making classic little pop songs That is what "Teardrop Fall" and "Shell Of A Fighter" are, the one surging with a syncopated *Scary Monsters* dance beat, the other a gleaming Fripp-fuelled flashback.

With the exception of David Sylvian, ex-members of Japan have all guested with No-Man at some time or other, and so Bowness's album with keyboardist Richard Barbieri is not much of a surprise *Flame* is more constrained than *Flowermouth* and its direction — early Eno, some *Meddle*-era Floyd — is very different Bowness's vocals retain their precision, but Barbieri is crunching his way through layers of oscillating sounds For "Song Of Love And Everything", these are arranged in loose, funky chunks, from its opening Harold Budd-like flotation, the title track does a quick turn into the type of twangy wistfulness that one would find on a Chris Isaak track, then resolves itself into a deeply complex thing

Flame's economical qualities work well Barbieri and Bowness offer few distractions, and in doing so offer a soundly thoughtful model to those who fear that Ambient music has become the soundtrack to *fin de siecle* cocktail parties

LOUISE GRAY

Orang
Herd Of Instinct
ECHO ECHCD 2 CD/MC

Talk Talk were always a band teetering on the brink of 'too-much-ness' One friend couldn't handle *Spirit Of Eden* because the woodwinds made him think of the theme to *Pogle's Wood*, the psychedelic animated children's show Orang are Talk Talk's rhythm section, Lee Harris and Paul Webb, and sho'nuff, *Herd Of Instinct* is as brave and foolish an odyssey into neo-Prog excess as any mounted by their former band

Orang's methodology is similar to the jam-and-chop approach of Can and Miles Davis during the early 70s The seven compositions on *Herd* were edited down from material generated during long Improv sessions As well as taking on 20 different musical and programming chores themselves, Harris and Webb draw on a floating pool of 16 musicians (including Graham Sutton of Bark Psychosis and Matt Johnson) That's a lot of sonic matter for them to daub on the walls of their grotto-like mixes

Like their prime influences (Can, Miles, Fela Kuti, African Headcharge), Orang's music combines groove and atmospherics, funk and Ambient spatiality And like those artists, Orang's vibe is ethnodelic and shamanistic Each musician is represented on the inner sleeve by a tribal totem or charm (sculpted by themselves at the recording sessions), while the artwork, and captions like "A view of the vision mountain from the ageless collective unconscious", propound a vague pro-Aboriginal people's eco-politics This 'time to get back in touch with what we in the West have lost' shtick may be a tad too Wobble-y to take seriously, but at its best Orang's music convinces you that they really are plugged into a primal matrix of voodoo







Echo: through Chrysalis/EMI

Mute, One Little Indian: through Pinnacle/RTM

New Albion: through Harmonia Mundi

Fugs: through Ace/Pinnacle

Rise: #210, 2116 Guadaloupe, Austin, Texas 78705, USA

Victo: through These

Rastascan: PO Box 3073, San Leandro, CA 94578-3073 USA

energy The opener, "Orang", is like AR Kane circa *69* if they'd had a shit-hot rhythm section underneath the textural fantasia, while the rolling polyrhythms and cosmic guitar of "Little Brother" recall the little-heard NYC mystics Saqqara Dogs

Perhaps the most ambitious track is "Anaon, The Oasis". It starts with eerily treated, transcendental moans echoing through subterranean chambers *a la* Can's "Augmn" or The Grateful Dead's "What's Become Of The Baby" Then Webb intones a fragile, dejected melody in a glottal quaver over a meandering groove Oozy Jon Hassell-like trumpet and cloudbursting female backing vocals finally push "Anaon" into the vicinity of Kate Bush's underrated album *The Dreaming* "Loaded Values" is even better Moondust vibes, braying harmonica and blues guitar trail around a runaway-train groove, decelerating as if hitting a gradient, the track mutates into something close to Techno, as Colette Meury's scat vocals vault skywards

Like their previous band, Orang valiantly walk that precarious line between garishly over-ripe and gorgeously overwhelming, but only rarely slip into the Prog swamp *Herd Of Instinct* is a most worthy addition to the post-rock canon

SIMON REYNOLDS

Graeme Revell
Musique Brut Collection

THE FINE LINE OF MUTE BRUT1 CD

The Australian Graeme Revell is probably best known as the founder (in 1978) of the brutal Industrial/performance group SPK, so this collection may come as something of a surprise as it is totally estranged from that past

The first half of the CD, dubbed *The Insect Musicians,* is entirely constructed from insect noises (grasshoppers, cicadas, bees, etc) recorded around the world in 1984-5, and then altered, rather heavily, by digital manipulation no conventional instruments have been used at all The inspiration derives from the Oriental poetic tradition — particularly Japan, where insect hunts on behalf of the Emperor were once commonplace — blending nature and formalism, and so the music has a strong Oriental flavour as well as utilising *musique concrète* and electronic sampling The liner notes state, "We find suggested new structures of musical syntax and semantics", but there's nothing here as radical as that

The Insect Musicians has a strong novelty/curiosity factor, but fails to live up to the initial interest it generates it's too digital to capture the ornate delicacy of Oriental classical music and too manipulated to highlight the insect noises Despite this, it's far more than a mere musicological field recording

A piece entitled *Necropolis, Amphibians & Reptiles* comprises the second half of the CD, in which Revell interprets the work of Adolf Wolfli, a painter, composer, writer, collage artist, poet and autobiographer — as well as a petty thief and molester of very little girls — who spent 35 years in a Swiss asylum for his crimes (caused, allegedly, by 'voices' he heard in his head) Despite only starting his artistic endeavours at 36, he was prolific, spending most of the day creating in his cell He spent the last four years of his life constantly working on his *Funeral March*, which despite spanning 16 volumes was never finished

Wolfli described his art as a "beautifully rhymed curse", often exploring the interconnections between text and sound poetry in a largely atonal manner, caught somewhere between the likes of Schoenberg and Debussy *Necropolis* is the more substantial of the two works on this collection, mainly because of Wolfli's mad, extraordinary life Revell finds a real affinity to Wolfli's work (the Australian once worked as a psychiatric nurse), whereas *The Insect Musicians* pieces are treated in a colder, more academic climate They hint at strange, radical concepts that deserve exploration, but could do without that freakshow element

JON ROGERS

Frederic Rzewski
The People United Will Never Be Defeated

NEW ALBION NA063 CD

The Fugs
Live From The 60s

FUGS RECORDS CDWIKD125 CD

Two attempts at using the Compact Disc to undermine US imperialism Frederic Rzewski wrote his hour-long piano sonata after hearing a street singer shout the slogan *"El pueblo unido jomas sera vencido!"* in Santiago, Chile in 1973 — shortly before General Pinochet's CIA-backed coup drowned President Allende's democratically elected 'Marxist' regime in blood (if the slogan — and Allende's politics — had been *"Los trobajodos unidos* " things might have turned out differently)

The piece is ushered in with a stirring crowd chant before unrolling one of Rzewski's typical free-flowing, reflective pieces of polystylism Stephen Drury plays beautifully, and as usual Rzewski manages an emotive cohesion despite the temptations to maudlin vapidity which the wide-open brief might invite He also quotes from "Bandiera Rossa" and Hans Eisler in order to underline his anti-fascist stance Although Rzewski avoids Cornelius Cardew's Maoist moralism (thou shalt not write music the workers can't understand), there's an element of frozen gesture about the politics, like looking at a leaflet in a museum Maybe Michael Finnissy's piano music — with its hysterical climaxes and psychological realism, its refusal to kowtow to academic standards — is more anti-fascist in the grain of its production than this sonata, however assured and pretty

Assured and pretty is everything The Fugs weren't, being the hairiest, wackiest anti-War protestors thrown up by the 60s If it was strange that their amateurish, free-love-and-marijuana vaunting party records saw the light of day back then, it's even stranger that Ace should release Ed Sanders's live tapes of the group 28 years later Sound quality is non-existent and the undergraduate 'humour' (*"William Blake is standing naked in the gorden* ") utterly unmirthful Ed Sanders and Tuli Kupferberg think they're so far out with their 'surreal' blues when in fact they are just sad and incompetent Unlike The Mothers Of Invention or Eugene Chadbourne, whose chaos is a front for innovative musicianship (and who also have a stringent sense of irony), this stuff is, well, crap

BEN WATSON

The Matthew Schipp Duo with William Parker
Zo

RISE RECORDS RR26 CD

Lisle Ellis
Elevations

VICTO CD027 CD

Randy McKean
So Dig This Big Crux

RASTASCAN RECORDS BRD 012 CD

Matthew Schipp is one of the only pianists making advances (if that's the word) on the freer fringes of jazz. Too many of Shipp's contemporaries are crudely tarred with the Cecil Taylor brush, but his *Zo* suite develops into a distinctive and accomplished personal effort The first of the suite's three parts is dedicated to Andrew Hill, who Schipp has said is his favourite contemporary pianist As the ideas unfold, however, it becomes clear that his range of influences is vast He can play with up-and-at-'em expressive abandon, but there's a certain deeply reflective cool shaping his work on each of the suite's sections Surprisingly sandwiched between the first and second parts of *Zo* is a version of "Summertime" which breathes life into a bloated old corpse by locating and drawing out an almost despairing pain Bassist William Parker is an ideal partner and plays with a melodic ingenuity and independent pulse that recalls Malachi Favors's duet work with Muhal Richard Abrams

Lisle Ellis is a San Francisco-based bassist who assembled a seven piece band including Larry Ochs (of The ROVA Saxophone Quartet) and Joe McPhee to perform the compositions that

make up *Elevations* There is some strong horn playing and a real sense of parallel improvising conceptions co-existing, but the disciplines of Ellis's compositions tend to inhibit the development of the music, with ensemble sections too often intervening just when things are looking interesting Ellis is a commanding bassist but the album's best moment is an Albert Ayler composition Otherwise, for all the sweat on the collective brow, it can't help provoking a nagging feeling of unfulfilled potential

The writing on Randy McKean's *So Dig This Big Crux* is both more absorbing and more appropriate to his band Though the music sounds nothing like that of the album's dedicatee, Anthony Braxton, it does share a sense of the liberating possibilities of tight control McKean plays both bass clarinet and alto sax and has a dry, humourous way of improvising but the real pleasure of the album is less in any solo performances than in the way the quartet (pianoless and featuring excellent trumpeter Paul Smoker) works as a unit They negotiate the twists and turns of the compositions with evident pleasure and coherence What moments of mere pastiche there are soon get swept away by the stop-start dynamics at play On the ball, uncomplacent, fun even, so, dig that big crux

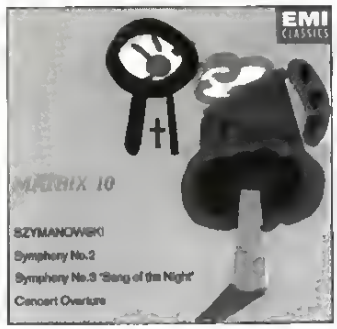
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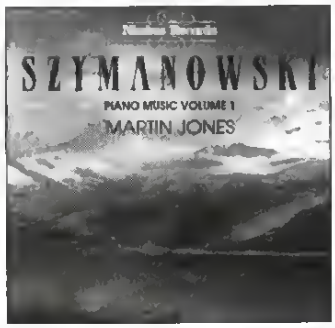
Slant
The Canning Town Chronicle
SOUND & LANGUAGE SLCD 0020 CD

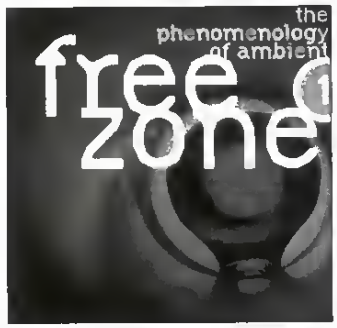
A boy and girl are reciting *"Buddleio buddleio pizzo parlour"*, someone is scratching a gamelan record, there's a stop-start violin riff, and the sleeve says this track is four minutes and 80 seconds long — it can only be the new Slant album!

Cris Cheek and Sianed Jones are the Sonny & Cher of experimental genre-skating, while Phil Jeck (the quiet one) is up the back with 180 Dansette record players and one Casio sampler Known for their fast and furious performances, Slant also record fast — this third album was taped in one day

The Canning Town Chronicle exists as album, book and show with "live floor action installation"







Sound & Language: 7 Durham Road, London E16 4NF

Stockhausen Verlag: Kettenberg 15, 5067 Kürten, Germany

Nimbus: through Nimbus

Crammed, XXP: through Vital

For this version of what it's like to live in East London, Slant have reinvented themselves as a rock band, with the help of Nic Murcott's drums and Jon Wilkinson's guitar Maybe it's a fond farewell to the urban experience, as all three core members have now moved out of London

Several of the tracks are kind of 'zoo rock', with harmonica, clarinets and lo-tech muck hurled in over the drums Cheek verges on singing — *"A red damn tongle born to raise blue hell"* comes out with a Beefheart scrape of the throat Other times he bellows poetry as though someone has just run over his foot Jeck seems to play bass lines by making his turntables growl

Other tracks are more atmospheric, in particular the beautiful "Clove Street", a tropical East End fantasy with cicadas and gamelan again — I guess it's the Bow Gamelan, from Canning Town you can just hear them across the Bow Creek.

CLIVE BELL

Karlheinz Stockhausen
Oktophonie
STOCKHAUSEN VERLAG 41 CD

A playing time of 70 minutes, partitioned by 99 separate cue points for the home listener's remote control Stockhausen has the hi-fi buff's interests at heart His sleeve note suggests, "Whoever can, should place four loudspeakers in the four corners of an almost square room", and goes on to tell you what volume you should play it "You will be amazed!" And so will your neighbours

Stockhausen's concern for optimum playback is part of his well-documented desire for absolute control Every composer is a control freak at some level, even Cage, who wanted to control his loss of control Stockhausen goes so far as to control — although not restrict — sale of the CDs in the Stockhausen Complete Edition by selling direct to interested buyers, and his playback suggestions are the nearest he can get to actually being in the room while you listen

Oktophonie was recorded at West German Radio's Electronic Music Studio, where the composer was able to control every millisecond of musical production Nothing so fallible as musicians, nothing so unreliable as conductors Stockhausen even provides digital tapes for anyone wishing to 'perform' the work. Nothing new there Electronic music is technological control, a refinement of the control implied by the whole system of notation on which Western art music relies But whereas the composer who provides performers with a score must at some point let the music go, Stockhausen refuses to relinquish it.

And when we get the CD onto our all-too-fallible playback system, what do we find? As the electronic instruments whoosh and whirr, the image that comes to mind is of a spaceship landing, and since the separate (though continuous) sections of the music have labels such as "Invasion", "Explosion", "Farewell", the image may be the right one The piece is an extract from *Dienstag Aus Licht* (*Tuesday From Light*), one of the seven operas in the composer's huge and continuing project to write an opera for each day of the week (The *Licht* cycle, if ever completed, will make Wagner's *Ring* seem a miniature.)

Stockhausen's technical notes provide no hint of dramatic content or context, although he has the *mot juste* when he calls it "outer spacious" In among the electronic hums, whirrs and whistles, there are occasional traces of the human voice, and some of the inhuman sounds resemble — perhaps deliberately — familiar instruments organ, trombone, percussion, strings But they are incidental moments in what is in essence an immensely sophisticated soundtrack There is something of New Age anodyne in the way the music rumbles painlessly on and on, rarely sounding any kind of climax, but there is also pleasure in the sheer corporeality of it the fingers tingle, the bones shake, the head aches I just can't help feeling that there is some kind of *Übermensch* trying to be born in all this Or maybe I've just seen too many science fiction movies

NICK KIMBERLEY

Karol Szymanowski
Symphony No 3 ("Song Of The Night")/Stabat Mater
EMI CLASSICS 7243 5 55121 CO/MC

Karol Szymanowski
Symphonies Nos 2 & 3 etc
EMI CLASSICS 7243 5 65082 CO

Karol Szymanowski
Complete Piano Music Volume One
NIMBUS NI5405/6 2CO

There's a lot of Szymanowski about all of a sudden — in addition to these three releases, his opera *King Roger* is also now available on Koch. Of course, everyone's seeking out 'the new Górecki' (even if in Szymanowski's case it turns out to be a Gorecki precursor). Szymanowski is a more plausible candidate than, say, the American Alan Hovhaness, because he is actually Polish, and what's more he's also, as Górecki has acknowledged, an important influence on the later composer.

So it's an earlier *Symphony No 3* that's the highpoint of the first of these discs (conducted by Simon Rattle). Szymanowski deserves to be better known — and better pronounced maybe (it's 'Shi-man-off-ski'). His music used to be the preserve of the late unlamented Polish state recording company Polskie Nagrania, so it's good to see some major label coverage. The most important Polish composer between Chopin and the post-war generation of Lutoslawski, Penderecki and Górecki, most of Szymanowski's music was composed when Poland did not exist as a state. He was born in what is now the Ukraine in 1882 and spent formative years in Berlin.

Szymanowski took a long time to find his own voice. In the early piano works in Martin Jones's recital, Chopin refracted through Scriabin is the main inspiration, and on the two orchestral discs this merges into the Germanic influence in the *Concert Overture* and *Symphony No 2* (ie Brahms, Richard Strauss). But from the magical opening chords of the *Third Symphony*, we are in the rich and exotic world of the mature composer. Rapturous, ecstatic, mystical, this "Song Of The Night" is utterly original and like nothing else in Western music.

The flexibility of tempo and dynamic contrast, not to mention the clarity produced by superior recording quality, make Simon Rattle's disc preferable to the mid-price reissue by the Polish Radio National Symphony Orchestra. His disc also includes the marvellous *Stabat Mater* of 1926 — which is similar to Stravinsky's *Symphony Of Psalms* from four years later in its tailoring of folk material and neo-classical values. The early piano music is interesting but less original. When up against luminaries like Zoltan Kocsis in the Debussy repertoire, Martin Jones's performances fall short, but here his virtuoso playing is excellent.
ANDY HAMILTON

Various Artists
Freezone One: The Phenomenology Of Ambient
CRAMMED/SSR 129 2CO

Various Artists
Ambient Definitions
XXP RECORDS 800 0003 CD

Is there anything left to say about Ambient? Most of the conceptual arguments — silence *qua* Cage, spatialisation of dance music, response to complexity and social change — have already been well rehearsed in these pages. But after a weekend spent playing this stuff while pottering around — music drifting in and out of focus as I wandered from room to room, my mind only ever half on it — I find there are one or two things left to say. Well, four actually.

One. Ambient compilations currently proliferate like some runaway cell culture. Interesting, the increasing importance of this format — the DJ culture approach, compilation as art. *Freezone One* (and what is it about Ambient that makes people toss in words like 'phenomenology'?) is like a Crammed Discs version of Virgin's *Brief History* series. It contains 23 tracks by as many artists from seven countries, including Hector Zazou, Davids Byrne and Cunningham, Moby, Pete Namlook and Geir Jenssen, and works as a piece (or two pieces — it's a double) rather than a series of separate tracks. Hats off to compiler Marc Hollander, then.

Two. In contrast to this historical (ie back catalogue) approach, on *Ambient Definitions* seven Benelux artists — of whom only Jo Bogaert (he of Technotronic) is familiar to me — have been asked to contribute "their different views on what Ambient is today". Their drab consensus (or "harmonious unity", as the sleeve note has it) is that Ambient is a kind of half-baked Techno. When Ambient and Techno first began to conflate, it seemed a splendid musical illustration of the paradoxical unity of opposites. Now that it's become an accepted style that people try (or are invited) to work within, it's rapidly deteriorating into insipid and ineffective cliche.

Three. What is Ambient? (Both of these compilations are racked in my local Berlin record store under "Trance/Techno".) The term, broadened so far beyond Eno's original definition, is becoming meaningless — anything can be Ambient, depends how you use it. One conclusion I draw from these discs is that Ambient is anything that isn't a song — unless it's a song in a foreign language you can't understand. (My favourite piece here is "Forest Hymn" by

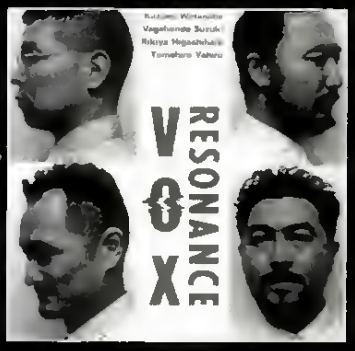
competition

win
the new CD by Resonance Vox

Kazumi Watanabe, Vagabonde Suzuki, Rikiya Higashira and Tomohiro Yahiro lead a double-drummer-led assault from the front line of Japanese Improv, on the Verve Forecast imprint.

To get your hands on one of 25 copies, tell us which of these three groups isn't really Japanese!

A – Shonen Knife
B – Half Japanese
C – Melon



Send your answer on a postcard to **Resonance Vox Competition, *The Wire*, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF.** Closing date: 26 August 1994.

Deep Forest on *Freezone One* — of which I can tell you nothing more than it is 5'19" long, recorded in France, gently optimistic, and in a foreign language I can't understand) Like Techno, World Music can be Ambient because it effectively lacks formal content — at least for anyone outside the culture of origin

Four the abundance of compilations such as these surely also indicates something about the political economy of the genre Some artists you only ever see on compilations So one last thing you can say about Ambient it's unlikely anyone is going to get rich out of it

DAVE RIMMER

Various Artists
Jam! Jam! Jam! Sugarhill: The Legendary Label

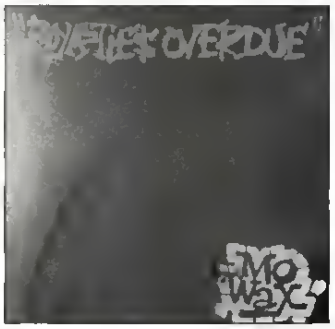
MUSIC COLLECTION INTERNATIONAL MUSCO 016 CD/MC

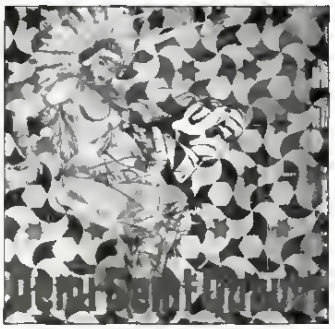
Sugarhill was the label of the earliest rap music It flushed HipHop out of the New York projects and into the international charts This collection of the company's greatest hits rounds up its early output practically if unimaginatively

Sugarhill dominated the rap idiom from the late 70s to the early 80s, and like Motown, it cultivated a distinctive in-house sound You can usually tell a Sugarhill rap track by its live instrumentation Like modern rap, the backings were culled from other records They 'sampled' Chic's "Good Times" and Queen's "Another One Bites The Dust" (for example) by having session musicians recreate them in the studio The rappers then worked over the live playing with unprecedented lyrical and vocal dexterity and dynamics

The downmarket packaging of this compilation suggests that the tendency to view these pioneering tracks as flimsy party-starters still exists In fact the sharp electric sound of "Mirda Rock" and the fractious musical collage of "Adventures Of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels Of Steel" are fascinating examples of the earliest appearances of a now omnipresent technology in the process of music making The overdone but enthusiastic use of crude drum machines, reedy voice synthesisers, creaky 'scratching' and tape editing techniques created music that crackled with the thrill of finding new methods of sound creation And cultural implications notwithstanding, all of these tracks swing with a fat boom slap

JAKE BARNES







Music Collection International: VCI House, Caxton Way, Watford, Hertfordshire WD1 8UF

Mo Wax: through Vital

ECM, GRP, Enja: through New Note

Jazz Door, Evidence: through Harmonia Mundi

God Mountain: through Impetus

All other Japan releases: through Rough Trade shops

Various Artists
Royalties Overdue

MO WAX MWCD 003

Old Soho soul shysters like Carleen Anderson, Galliano and The Brand New Heavies have all broken overground recently, but to my/many ears it sounds like the same old pauper's funk — texturally dead, stylistically dated, vocally constipated, carnally void

James Lavelle's Mo Wax label/stable is supposed to be a cutting edge corrective to all this, a step onward or sidewise from the woefully retro post-Acid Jazz scene. 'Trip Hop', it has been dubbed. a fusion of Acid Jazz's fixation with retro correctness — beats, grooves, scenes, vibes, collars, etc — enlivened by the avant garde fisticuffs of HipHop If Acid Jazz — the Talkin Loud stable et *al* — just politely re-present various past scenes, HipHop often tries to present the sonically un-presentable, to make the future irrupt into the Now

To begin with on this compilation, it sounds like Lavelle and Co may have pulled it off Kicking off with DJ Shadow's "Influx" may be the smartest or the dumbest thing to do, because this is as good as it gets — and it *is* good a Rare Groove boy's rejig of "The Blue Room", a HipHop snakes and ladders game of hisses, whispers, elisions, silence, violence But this is a pit bull among poodles, because the rest — 15 tracks over two CDs — is a decidedly mixed bag which brings your hopes way back down to (Mother) Earth again There are exceptions — one DJ Krush track, one Palmskin Productions track, both La Funk Mob tracks stuff roughly of the just-more-than-OK standard of The Sandals, which is to say, The Jimmy Castor Bunch to Galliano's Double Deckers — but mostly these are the sort of pallid lifeless jazz funk bands Gary Crowley dots *The Beat* with the Misty Oldland end of the circles of Hell

The more you think about it, the more "Influx" seems like an exception rather than a portent It has after all taken the entire scene — from Rare Groove shops to Talkin Loud chart success — ten whole years to come up with a single track of *monumental* sonic beauty (and DJ Shadow is American!) This is indeed the *beef*, but, as Jeff Bridges memorably put it in *The Fabulous Baker Boys*, everything else is just parsley (and that horrible gritty frozen supermarket stuff, to boot) Try to hear "Influx", but for the rest, for the meantime, don't believe the hype

IAN PENMAN

in brief **japan**

David Ilic unpacks some strange cargo from the Far East

The Boredoms Onanie Bomb Meets The Sex Pistols (REPRISE 9 41559 CD) **The Boredoms Super Roots** (WEA JAPAN WMC3 41 CD) Having now bagged them longterm, WEA Japan has wasted no time in rifling through The Boredoms' sizeable archives Not all of the 12 tracks on *Onanie Bomb* will be unfamiliar to the cognoscenti the Walkman-in-the-bedroom recordings which Yamatsuka Eye and (now Zeni Geva) guitarist Tabata first laid on the world back in 1983 reappeared last year as *Anal By Anal* (SSE), others, albeit with some different edits, were added to the Shimmy Disc CD of the band's second album *Soul Discharge* Don't be twigged by the title allusion to The Sex Pistols — Rotten and Co, for all their brusqueness, were really stuck on 60s pop form, when The Boredoms get their hands on the detonator, nothing — least of all reverence — is spared Originally released in Japan last year, *Super Roots* has latterly turned up here as a US import and with three cuts removed Clearly from these latest

recordings, The Boredoms' aesthetic remains the same even if the sound doesn't. The hard, rock apparel of *Onanie Bomb* is pushed aside in favour of more sketchy experimentation with toys and multifarious ethnic instruments. Even Eye's vocal histrionics drop back! In the true spirit of Dadaism, The Boredoms slip through the restraints, taunting you like errant kids. A voice drawls on "Nuts Room" *"I'm just pissing around."* And yet there's a beguiling quality about this bunch of avant punk racketeers which is both tantalising and terrifying.

Demi Semi Quaver Demi Semi Quaver (GOO MOUNTAIN GMCO 008 CD) Strip away a few avantist pretensions and what is left of Demi Semi Quaver translates into a cracking, frenzied Pere Ubu. Singer Emi could pass for Chrissie Hynde in disguise, maybe even Nina Hagen, she shares that same, strangely compelling quality which comes from catching words on the back of the throat. And like Shelly Hirsch, she's amazingly agile. But the music crowds her space, the pace is relentless and the production is brittle sounding, compacting the instruments rather than spacing them across the stereo field and ultimately robbing the music of depth. Like sherbet on your tongue, the sound fizzes away, but its tart qualities fade from memory just a bit too quickly for comfort.

Tetsuo Furudate The Tragedy Of Macbeth (SSE COMMUNICATIONS SSE4D30CO CO) Based on William Shakespeare, says the cover. But Furudate's *Macbeth* is based only in the loosest sense, stripping the Shakespearian text down to single lines, which are used as preludes to some of the piece's ten movements. Rather than sticking purely with the narrative, guitarist/composer Furudate reflects on the Tragedy, explores its atmospheres, not so much soundtrack *per se* as audio theatre. Not all of the 'found' material is strictly referential alongside samples of other 'impressions' — Orson Welles films and Richard Strauss's symphonic poems — there are lifts from religious texts, other classical works, tape documentary and soundscape. Other contributions are more deliberate. Ruins' drummer Tatsuya Yoshida, heavily reverbed, engages in a battle of the titans with Furudate's ray gun keyboard electronics, while Jap noise king Masami Akita (aka Merzbow) fries the speaker wire with his now infamous extremities into the world of raw sculpted sound. Furudate's guitar is no less fearsome a player in these dark, sometimes grotesque episodes (like Jap guitar icon Keiji Haino, Furudate sings the body electric), but then *Macbeth* also reflects, uses silence and space not just as respite but to further pile on the tension. An extraordinary record that is far more than just the sum of its parts.

Ruins & Hatoba Ruins-Hatoba (CHARNEL MUSIC CHCO 12 CO) Room to experiment means there's got to be room to make mistakes. And the first 11 minutes of "Rock + 1 (Challenge Your Face)" (just love those titles) is quite a big mistake. So this is what the bass/drums thunder duo and Magma wannabes Ruins, and Boredoms' guitarist Yamamoto Seiichi's wildly eclectic three piece Hatoba get up to backstage: an overlong acapella shout-in, in which one of them plays the gruff, throaty chorus master and the rest of them yap away like a bunch of crazed Pekinese dogs. The best stuff from this Jap rock underground head-to-head is culled from front of house. The two bands vary the interaction, sometimes they seem to spin in entirely different orbits, and then suddenly they'll cross each other like an eclipse. The effect is almost like watching one of those split screen movies, where feeling goggle-eyed is part and parcel of the desired effect. You never quite get a handle on it — and some post-performance tweaking at the mixing desk makes it all the more slippery. A wayward if rather patchy treat in which both bands cast off their respective mannerisms and pitch towards fresh musical terrain.

Kazutoki Umezu Eclecticism (KNITTING FACTORY WORKS KFW 130 CD) Eclectic by name and nature, saxophonist Umezu's live workout with an ad hoc casting of sundry ex-Lounge Lizards (guitarist Marc Ribot and trombonist Curtis Fowlkes) and Knitting Factory familiars (bassist Brad Jones and percussionists Sam Bennett and Dougie Bowne) gets down to some serious partying with other people's styles: a dash of Zorn on the funky "Horse Work" and a more liberally applied Jan Garbarek-style lyricism on the Eastward-pointing "Juicy Mami", set against a backdrop of pealing Frisell-like drapes. "Yakitori" is cutting, angular post-bop, "Lulu & Roro", a tribute to multi-horn man Roland Kirk, nods almost as decisively in the direction of The Art Ensemble, "Ballet Dancer" could pass for a slice of Brechtian cabaret, full of exaggerated gestures, and "Western Picaro" is beautifully evocative — the dry dusty trails whipped up when Ribot spurs the ensemble into a gallop could almost have been tailored to a Sergio Leone flick.

(David Illic would like to thonk Ed Baxter and Andrew Wolker for their help in compiling this In Brief)

in brief **new jazz**

Linton Chiswick improvises his way through the pick of the recent jazz releases

John Abercrombie Trio Speak Of The Devil (ECM 1511 CD) **John Scofield Quartet Plays Live** (JAZZ DOOR JD1249 CD) There is a hushed and warmly intense quality to John Abercrombie's new line up of electric guitar, Hammond organ and drums. It lent memorable weight to the trio's first release last year, and continues to do so with *Speak Of The Devil*. This is delicate chamber fusion, even when driven up-tempo by flashing cymbals and punchy toms the music breathes shallowly, looking inward for its flame. For much of "Dreamland" the trio hover just above silence, drifting gracefully through the changes.

On the second of these releases, John Scofield's 1991 quartet, hustled along by Marc Johnson's busy double bass, is captured in all its quirky and energetic glory, live in the States. Probably taped from the mixing desk, the three tracks combine a crystal-clear 'studio' sound with the superior *feel* of a concert. "Chariots" bristles with a rough and funky, *outside* guitar solo before saxophonist Joe Lovano, exceptional throughout, blows something so unforgivably climactic and complicated it could only come from genius. This is required listening for Scofield/Lovano fans.

Chick Corea Expressions (GRP 97732 CD) **Abdullah Ibrahim Knysna Blue** (ENJA/TIP TOE 888 816 CO) Somebody should start a society for jazz musicians who have recorded an album called *Expressions*. This particular *Expressions* is Chick Corea's first solo album in some time and appears to have been recorded shortly after last year's solo piano tour. The vast majority of the material consists of Broadway and jazz standards, and gives Corea a chance to pay tribute to the masters. Art Tatum is singled out for a dedication, and, unlikely though it may seem, Tatum's influence is there in the percussive but clear downward runs and the elegant, almost antique swing — an approach quite dissimilar to Corea's earlier ECM piano records.

Knysna Blue is a mixture of the kind of gentle, introspective solo piano work in which Abdullah Ibrahim excels and some multi-tracked compositions, adding up to an inspired and deeply moving tribute to South African mysticism and internal strength. Empowered by its own rawness and lack of polish, *Knysna Blue* is an affecting appeal to the heart, and includes a beautiful performance of "Peace" and the upbeat and gently defiant "You Can't Stop Me Now".

Franklin Kiermyer Quartet featuring Pharoah Sanders Solomon's Daughter (EVIDENCE ECD 22083 CD) **Chico Freeman Quintet featuring Arthur Blythe The Unspoken Word** (RONNIE

SCOTT'S JAZZ HOUSE JHCD 030 CD)

Trio Idea featuring Jerry Bergonzi Napoli Connection (RED RR123261 CD) Canadian drummer Kiermyer calls *Solomon's Daughter* 'ecstatic American music', and that isn't a bad description of the mode based, but essentially free, Coltrane-influenced, 60s style jazz his quartet plays. Kiermyer sounds like Elvin Jones and Rashied Ali wrapped into a furious, thunderous package, he must be one of the most exciting and intense drummers around. Sanders is magnificent — wailing through each track with the spirit, strength and terrifying ferocity that made him famous. *Solomon's Daughter* makes this music sound new and dangerous again.

Chico Freeman's partnership with Arthur Blythe has brought more than its fair share of excitement to Ronnie Scott's club. These recordings, made there last year, also feature Julian Joseph on piano, swinging hard with bassist Curtis Lundy and drummer Idris Muhammad, but it is the winning combination of the playful and sometimes romantic Freeman and the gutsy Blythe that is this record's undoubted attraction.

Ex-Dave Brubeck reedsman Jerry Bergonzi travels to Italy to make his records, and plays fluent, melodic tenor, tipping his hat to both Sonny Rollins and Sanders along the way. Bergonzi is without doubt a fine soloist, with a wealth of harmonic tricks under his fingers, but a little less tidiness, elegance and melody would have been a good thing. Perhaps a ruder rhythm section might have provoked a more emotional performance.

James Newton Ensemble Suite For Frida Kahlo (AUDIOQUEST AQCD1023) Gracefully treading a difficult path between Afrocentric jazz improvisation and European classical composition, James Newton should be regarded as one of the most creative and profound voices in contemporary American music. His *Suite For Frida Kahlo*, based on four specific paintings by the Mexican artist and revolutionary, are a sombre and moving tribute both to Kahlo and to Newton's own vision. The ensemble's unusual line up (flute, two trombones plus rhythm section, expanded for the suite by bassoon and another flautist doubling on a variety of reeds), makes a clear, uncluttered sound, even at its busiest. Before the suite, Newton jousts with the two trombones on "The Verdict", written with the Rodney King incident in mind, and featuring a thrilling, fast but imaginative solo by pianist Kei Akagi. "Elliptical" is a lively, virtuoso duet between Newton and trombonist George Lewis, whose presence adds considerably to this record's strength.







Jazz House, Quinnah: through Cadillac

Red: through Harmonia Mundi

CMP: through New Note

Tommy Boy: through RTM/Pinnacle

Kold Sweat: through Greyhound

NRG Ensemble Calling All Mothers (QUINNAH RECORDS Q05 CD) **Jimi Sumen Paintbrush, Rock Penstemon** (CMP 61 CD) Despite the death of its visionary leader Hal Russell, the NRG Ensemble story continues, aided by new member Ken Vandermark on tenor saxophone, clarinet and bass clarinet. That fiery, but good-hearted and generous spirit of adventure that marked the ensemble's music under Russell survives abundantly here, characterised by quirky but strong compositions and a humorous and manic kind of 'punk swing' that somehow looks at Gene Krupa through post-Ayler eyes. As well as the infectious enthusiasm, the sheer collective virtuosity and accuracy of this band is breathtaking.

Noisy electric guitarist Jim Sumen's band is in fact Edward Vesala's Sound And Fury group, with Vesala himself playing drums, composing the music and credited for production — so it is hardly surprising that *Paintbrush, Rock Penstemon* is not a radical departure from Vesala's ECM records. While NRG looks back mainly to the jazz tradition for its own madcap musical sensibility, Sumen's band combines rock with European classical music and gritty, sombre Finnish folk, and creates an ensemble sound with the capacity for both percussive, aggressive freedom and dark foreboding. Sumen's heavily distorted guitar is featured at the front of the mix throughout.

Eric Reed It's All Right To Swing (MOJAZZ 530 255 CD) **Terence Blanchard The Billie Holiday Songbook** (COLUMBIA 475926 CD) **Black/Note Jungle Music** (COLUMBIA 476505 CD) Wynton Marsalis protege Eric Reed plays tame, but melodic and swinging piano, combining a spacey sense of understatement reminiscent of Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett, with a bluesy, gospel-tinged voice. With bassist Rodney Whitaker and drummer Greg Hutchinson, this is a diffident and discreet trio, subtle and interesting, but considerably enlivened by the occasional addition of Marsalis soundalike trumpeter E Dankworth and the exciting saxophonist Wessel Anderson.

Trumpeter Terence Blanchard's latest release sounds like another of his lush Spike Lee film soundtracks. Taking 12 classic tunes associated with Billie Holiday, he plays elegant, brassy solos with a muscularity reminiscent of Clifford Brown, accompanied by rhythm section and orchestra, and joined on five tracks by vocalist Jeanie Bryson. The soft but expansive arrangements err on the sentimental side, but are not cliched enough really to be a discredit to Blanchard, and they certainly don't stop him playing some singing, lyrical trumpet.

Black/Note are a young, acoustic post-bop sextet, again out of America's neo-classical pool. Trumpeter Gilbert Castellanos stands out for his fiery, confident solos, but skilful and schooled though the rest undoubtedly are, there is little to distinguish *Jungle Music* from the mass of well executed post-bop recordings coming out of the States these days.

Biggi Vinkeloe Trio Mbat (LJ RECORDS LJR5209 CD) **The Reform Art Movement Subway Performance** (GRANITE RECORDS GR 93003/RAU1021 CD) Sweden-based free improvisor Biggi Vinkeloe worked for a while with Cecil Taylor, and is joined here by fellow ex-Taylor sideman Peeter Uuskyla on drums and the great

Barre Phillips on bass A cautious, restrained and tense alto saxophone and flute voice, she is more head than heart, but the spookily melodic results are compelling indeed "Mbat" is a worthy title track — ten minutes of imaginative and focused trio interaction along a sombre path Similarly, "Sri Lanka" (alto, slapped bass and hand claps) is a superb lesson in listening, as the bass and saxophone involve themselves in a long and thrilling dialogue

A conglomeration of improvising musicians working within the European tradition, the Austria-based Reform Art Unit has involved many of Europe's leading players since its conception in the late 60s On this CD, the title track is preceded by "Inside Work", a seven-part work dedicated to Sunny Murray and performed by five of the Unit's core players Strings and woodwinds shimmer gently through this atmospheric and intriguing improvisation, culminating in an impressionistic and beautiful last movement "The Subway Performance", played by an augmented band including Murray himself and the brilliant Tuvan singer Sainkho Namtchylak, is a busier, *bigger* (and much longer) work, carried forward on nervous, frenetic energy, and featuring some colourful moments

outline **hiphop**

Kodwo Eshun adjudicates in the fight between realtime and mechanoid rap

The fatal flaw of HipHop played on 'real' instruments (guitar, bass, drums, plus samplers and turntables) is not only that it's predictably ponderous but that it's actually pointless Samples can do the realtime groove thang just as well as the post-human disincarnate anti-groove thang, so why bother with all those cumbersome session players?

Defenders of realtime rap usually hark back to the elusive interaction of the 70s fusion of Bob James or Roy Ayers, and the soul jazz of Lou Donaldson or Grant Green, a hands on experience best recaptured through a live mix of freestyling (the MC as improvising soloist) and band But the better the record the worse it should sound 'live' Freestyling, moreover, has all the faults of rock solos — it's more fun to do than watch Conversely, for HipHop to sound 'live' or 'uncooked' on record shrinks its sense of inhuman impossibility (everything humans can't do) into a paradoxically pre-digital realism (things humans *can* do), which is a self-inflicted crackdown on possibilities

From The Ground Up, the debut album from Philadelphia's The Roots (Talking Loud S189412 CD/LP), exemplifies this stance The focus of the record is the affirmative acrobatics of the MCs (an intricate 'flow' of internal rhymes, staccato syllabics, elaborate enjambment) which means the backing tracks (limpid pools of wah-wah and electric piano) have to stay static to act as a safety net. Sonic FX are abruptly amputated a kazoo mimes the lead in to JVC Force's "Strong Island", and bagpipes appear only to imitate a modal loop that any old SK900 could do

To hear why groups such The Roots, or like-minded souls Urban Species and US3, are literally redundant, track down KMD's second album *Black Bastards* (WEA promo) Like their underrated 1991 album *Mr Hood Mr Hood Mr Hood*, it's a collage epic which recycles, repels and revels in the aural overspill of a 'Negrophobic' US pop culture KMD can groove if they want to, as on the delicious piano ripples of "Plumskins", but this is just one texture within an assemblage of songs that have no gravity, that are twisted about like vengeful silly putty, that are ambushed and interrupted like a maliciously precise *Itchy And Scratchy* cartoon played for serious laughs Unstable, encyclopaedic, brilliant

Where a group such as The Roots take the most worn out unit of expression — ie the saxophone solo — as their model, (the miserably named) G Love And Special Sauce retreat further back to an acoustic blues, a close miked intimacy of guitar, bass and drums Their self-titled debut album (Okeh Records 476632 CD) has an unwired purity to it, but G Love's nasal, lazy, sloppy tone nicely smudges and slurs the detail of what he's saying On "Walk To Slide" the layered harmonics hover and shimmer, blurring words until they start to linger and dawdle around the curlicues of picked guitar G Love And Special Sauce represent a Bohemian take on rap that will get more notice than Kirk's first album *Makin' Moves* (Atlantic 7 567 82601 CD), which is utterly standard lyrically but has a quietly damaged sombreness that's reminiscent of the feted Nasty Nas Sibilant and mentholated, the production forsakes the fat bandwidth of grooves for an anorexic acupuncture in which synths are needles, the guitar is icy vapour and John Barry strings swirl and coil in the frosted air

I hear rappers such as G Love And Special Sauce as a reactive undrugging of Cypress Hill's OD blues, a salvage operation which saves it from their spooked out electric sneering But it's too late for such a move, something The Gravediggaz make clear on their debut *Niggamortis* album (Island GEE14 CD) On "Defective Trip", "Suicide" and especially "6ft Deep", two years of goodtime odes to Mary Jane flip over into the paranoia of an ego unravelled by constant dope use They're willing their own dissolution no less, but the rest of the album is Hanna Barbera horrorcore, but not as much fun as that sounds, not unravelled enough Unlike Coolio's "Fantastic Voyage" (Tommy Boy 12" Promo) in which a rolling, sweetly swaying party mood throws the horror it holds at bay into an even sharper relief Similarly, Northwest crew Krispy 3's *Herd Out Da Gate* (Kold Sweat KSMCD 302 CD/LP) gets out from underneath its influences and emerges fresh and urgent, astutely non-affirmative

House Of Pain are a third response to Cypress Hill, and their second album, *Same As It Ever Was* (XLMC 115 CD/LP), comes complete with the same Soul Assassins signatures as before — the bass lines double up and buckle with the same elasticity and the high-end feedback winds and whistles through their thick ears, a replay that's definitively ruined by the scouring powder croak of lead MC Everlast His kartoon komparisons aren't stoopid enough anymore, they're just punchlines you've already heard

The Goats, on the other hand, got out from under the anxiety of Cypress Hill's influence on their 1991 album *Tricks Of The Shade* by channeling dope's tendency to allegory into a high concept Yippie picaresque that was maybe too smart — that is, too stoned and too rambling On *No Goats, No Glory* (Columbia 476937 CD/MC/LP) their band plays a hard thrash fusion, the bass dragging the feedback into a bent-kneed Bad Brains-era hardcore that gets slower the more it speeds up When HipHop goes guitar, it's meant to be utopian and here "Rumblefish" adds on a ragga chorus so that you're hearing three kinds of real hardcore at once — multiplex boogie times for the baggy tribes the skaters who mosh, the homies who headbang

EUROJAZZ REVIEW

Eurojazz Review is a new quarterly magazine consisting of new articles/interviews by English and American writers, and articles originally written in French and other languages and now available in English for the first time. Issue 1, August 1994, has articles on Duke Ellington (by Max Harrison), Oliver Nelson (by Richard Palmer) and an interview with Wynton Marsalis by American writer Jesse Nash, and articles on Miles Davis and the jazz repertoire. Five interesting articles of around 3,000 words each.

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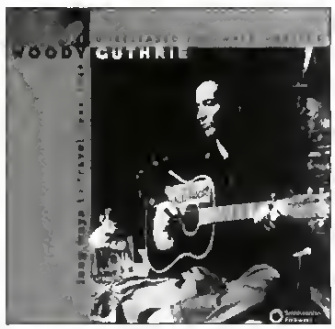
and the stoners who want to put their heads out while stage diving

Born Jamericans' album *Kids From Foreign* (Delicious Vinyl 7567 92349 CD) also lifts off from ragga to rap and then New Jack Swing within the same track but it's an upscale move rather than The Goats' Freak Flag Alt Drag Pristine as it's possible to get, they hear ragga as champagne smoothness rather than the raspy griminess which The Goats get off on

The best I've saved till last. Jeru The Damaja's *The Sun Rises From The East* (Payday/FFRR B2B526 CD) is the most carefully disorientating debut in HipHop since Showbiz And AG's *Runaway Slave* last year Jeru's a Cubist whose vector — not flow — is rigorously tangential to whatever minimally discrete waveforms his producer DJ Premier is working through Because his breaks are very short, Jeru has very little time for rhymes yet he slows down all the more, leaving gaping spaces between syllables and then accenting odd stress points within the syntax so that each sentence awkwardly straddles a rhythm in the way Picasso painted a nose at cross purposes with normal perspective On "Static" Premier's production is just that a loop of record crackle and the merest smear of bass "D' Original" plays like a hammered cluster of treated piano chords *"Every time I pick up the mic I drug it,"* Jeru intones with an appalling seriousness, and it's right here, in the drug/tech interface that sampladelia opens up, that you find the best reason to keep HipHip mechanoid







Delicious Vinyl, Payday: through Polygram

GPR, NovaMute, Warp: through RTM/Pinnacle

Rising High: through RTM/Pinnacle, SRD

Ocora, Chant Du Monde: through Harmonia Mundi

Globestyle: through Ace/Pinnacle

Smithsonian Folkways: through Koch

Sub Rosa: through Cargo, These, Impetus

Blanca Li: through Discovery

outline horror

Susan Masters has shivers down her spine listening to the new Techno releases

Youth and horror go hand in scaly glove, and whether this predilection for a cheap thrill underscores a repression of forbidden taboos and desires, an expression of social anxieties or merely a rite of passage for pimply adolescents, Techno seems perfectly placed to exploit its popularity Unlike earlier horror-fixated musical genres (Metal, Goth), Techno makes explicit the kind of man/machine hybrids contemporary nightmares are made of Accordingly, an ever-growing vanguard of acts is shaking off the feelgood vibe, terrorising a dancefloor audience abnormally tuned in to the fear factor

Voodoo Child's "Demons" EP (Novamute NoMu32 CD/12") is a jaw-snapping leap for the jugular An Acid pound with Gothic overtones, it's produced by New Yorker R Hall and plays upon our fears of mutation Loops are juggled with rhythmic aplomb but the hyper-disciplined sense of order these induce soon warps, breached by waves of gamelan shudders and raspingly waspish snarls

Joey Beltram is a past master at such sorcery An Italian who cites Heavy Metal rather than the rave scene as his muse, he's already conjured a handful of hardcore spectres, including the 12" classics "Vortex" and "Energy Flash" Unfortunately, his latest release, the "Caliber" EP (Warp WAP 49 CD/12"), is a ghost train fated to remain in its sidings Infected with a sense of indolent languor, the canned shrieks and trickling squiggles barely rise above the clatterings of the indifferent snare

Wagon Christ are light years ahead Straddling the divide between the experimental avant garde and Techno, their *Phat Lab Nightmare* (Rising High RSN 1B CD/LP) defrosts Throbbing Gristle in deepest space — where no-one can hear you scream! This is trance music at its darkest and least somnambulent Jarring harmonics swim past twisted frequency tones in an eerie void where East and West melt into one, the whole trip resembling a slow-motion slide round the rim of a glass with only the occasional HipHop beat for company

If all this sounds a little too scary, Germ reduce horror to a gentle process of animation A previous release, "The Black Chair" EP, used trombone and cardboard tube to augment an electronic free jazz with amusing results, but the new *Gone* LP (GPR 6 CD/LP) is just plain silly Like a cartoon monster taking its first few tottering steps it cheekily drools its way through a whole swarm of pre-lingual splats and splurges Even the titles are jauntily monosyllabic, including such grunting, gurgling epics as "Blib", "Sap" and "Bot"

A couple of years ago, Coco, Steel And Lovebomb, an outfit built around Brighton DJ Chris 'Coco' Mellor, created one of the most terrifying tracks to hit the dancefloor "Feel It" combined a menacing bass line with an insistently tribal beat and growling layers of synth releasing an icy sense of danger that crawled along your spine like the brush of a bat's wing Now this chiller is available again as the last track on a double LP/single CD entitled *It* (Warp WAP 24 CD/MC) Again horror is the key, adding a new dimension to an album that would otherwise have spanned familiar terrain Drifting from impressionistic postcards of places as diverse as Moscow and Harlem to muscle-flexing Garage and disco, it's a record that's plagued with ghosts "Progress" wipes the dust of time from the Russian Metro to uncover the voices of the past lurking beneath "Cote Sauvage" uses a curtain of windchimes to add a sense of unease to a day on the beach, and even on "Disco Dub", a seemingly healthy Garage track with a Mediterranean glow, spooky exhortations rise from the depths like the plumbing-bound voices in the film *Delicatessen* Whether all these elements cohere, however, is another matter

Chill Out Or Die Volume Two (Rising High RSN 17 CD/LP) has the strangest cover I've ever seen on an Ambient compilation No doubt inspired by some shlock B-movie, the body of a raver/headbanger is slowly disappearing into a mincing machine under banner headlines promising "Spine-tingling chills" and tracks that will turn "flesh and bones into melting ambience"

Unlike most compilations, *Chill Out Or Die* coheres beautifully Using long, slow, gentle cross-fades, each track floats into a continuous mix that mimics the surreal flight-paths of the dreaming mind Nightmares melt smoothly

into dreams, ensnaring the listener in an ever-slowing vortex of hypnotic revolution. At times the effect is almost visual — the violent thrashings of Shark Trax's "Shark" or the motorboat chug in MLO Productions' suitably wraithlike "Ghost", which is lifted from their new 'imaginary soundtracks' album *Io* (Rising High RSN 16 CD/LP) — at others it's purely atmospheric. But for a quadruple LP/double CD offering appearances from acts such as Influx, Syzygy, Mixmaster Morris and the reappearance of Wagon Christ, the worst horror I could find in this world of dissonant carillons and leisurely drifts was the contribution from New London School Of Electronics. A bit too Jean Michel Jarre for my liking.

Still, it's an infinitely better investment than Rising High's other current Ambient compilation, *The Secret Life Of Trance Volume Three* (Rising High RSN 2D CD/LP), which hides exciting contributions from Union Jack, Black Dog (recording under the name of Balil) and Oliver Lieb among the usual hotchpotch of mismatched also-rans.

outline **international**

Richard Scott travels the world in seach of the global sound banks

When the Compact Disc first reared its head in the mid-80s many panicked about the future of 'marginal' musics. It was felt an FM pop mono-culture was emerging in which avant garde, archival and international recordings had no place, old recordings would vanish along with vinyl and new ones would no longer appear. If anything the reverse has occured. The thousands of hours of excellent CDs, series and boxed sets of rare, ancient, distant and esoteric musics now confronting the listener is daunting and way beyond any kind of quantification. Even a survey of recent material could only touch the tip of the iceberg. However...

To start at the pinnacle, the Ocora label seems to be trying to re-release everything it's ever put out, which is a very good thing. A fine place for the new listener to start is *The World Of Traditional Music* (C S60061-66 CD) a *relatively* inexpensive boxed set of six CD compilations recorded in Africa, Asia and Europe which contains some seven hours of beautifully remastered classic recordings including whispered Burundi song, Zairian electric sanzas, ghostly Romanian gypsy slack-fiddling and some heart rending Burmese music. With the exception of the Indian classical music excerpts, whose sheer length means they are virtually impossible to fit into bite-sized compilations, these examples are superbly edited, collected and annotated to make a very rich and listenable collection whose variety is neatly balanced by the label's commitment and consistency of approach. Some helpful essays on each region optimistically attempt to make some shape of it all, and to some extent succeed. Far and away the best collection of its kind. Monumental, in fact.

Other Ocora collections of particular interest include *Cambodia: Music Of The Royal Palace* (C S630034 CD), a set of anonymous historic recordings of very elegant gamelan and vocal dance musics recorded between 1966 and 1979, and now, it seems, largely extinct. Likewise *The Goro Of The Madhupur Forest From Bangladesh* (C SBDDS4 CD) documents the dying art of the oral historian: wistfully intimate solo voices expounding on marriage, death, the harvest and the spirits over inexplicably compelling metronomic percussion figures. On a very different tack, Gopal Krishan's *The Art Of The Vichitro Vina* (C S6004B-49 CD) contains a brace of fantastic Hindustani classical improvisations on a monstrous sitar/slide guitar-like instrument which, beginning from a supernatural calm, escalates to the most frighteningly intense proportions. Talip Ozkan's *Art Of The Tanbur* (C S6D042 CD) is more modest, finding the Turkish classical virtuoso singing quietly of love, nature and obsession while plucking the biggest banjo I've ever seen. The sound is surprisingly small, but also overwhelming, meditative and a little dry.

Selling by the bucketload is a dignified live set of Irish traditional music by violinist Frankie Gavin with guitarist Arty McGlynn and accordionist Aidan Coffey (C S60021 CD) which pulls back from the insane tempos which generally characterise this genre. For me the Globestyle label's continuing series of classic recordings of Irish music from the Topic archives is more interesting. My favourite is *The Gentlemen Pipers* (CDORBD DB4) which collects some magnificient recordings of Uillean pipers such as Leo Rowsome, Willie Clancy and Seamus Ennus. Evan Parker fans might find a great deal of interest in their popping and stuttering rhythmic play, while the ballads could crack the most impermeable of souls. *I'm Leaving Tipperary* (CDORBD 082) documents bighearted, crackly tunes, in various degrees of disrepair, by Irish immigrants and their descendents cut in New York in the 192Ds and 30s.

You don't need to be a musicologist to imagine the effect these recordings must have had on American music. Smithsonian Folkways' enormous traditional catalogue (some 2100 albums) attests to this and plenty more and is almost comprehensively available in the UK for the first time. Their CD issuing programme of North American folk musics includes Woody Guthrie's *Long Ways To Travel* (SF CD 4DD46) and Cisco Houston's lovely *The Folkway Years 1944-61* (SFCD 4DDS9). Banjomen Doc Watson and Clarence Ashley's exhaustive 1960-62 collection of pre-bluegrass Appalachian old-timey music (SF40029/30) collects old and 'new' material in an absorbing set which suggests all kinds of correspondences between Irish, English, American and, more surprisingly, Malian music (I'm not kidding. Ashley's beautiful "Co-Co Bird" might almost be a Sali Sidibe or Djeneba Diakite track).

Less surprising is the influence of West Africa in Smithsonian Folkways' four CD series of African-American spirituals, *Wade In The Water* (SF 40072-7S), which spans the breadth of the current gospel scene. It's fascinating to hear the relative weights and influences of Africa and Europe on this music, and how the social class of the performers seems to pull them in one direction or the other. To me the heavily West African congregational moans and call and response singing of The United Southern Prayer Band and The McIntosh County Shouters, who are crab-packers and fishermen, singing in less formal improvisatory settings, are much more inspired than the polished professional concert performers, ranging from the populist Sweet Honey In The Rock to the rather ossified 'historical' approach of the Fisk Jubilee singers (a 120 year old outfit) and The Florida A&M University Concert Choir, who sound like a bunch of musicology stiffs resurrecting a dead tradition for posterity. One notable exception is Lou Bell Johnson's positively fervent acappella version of Charles Albert Tindley's "Stand By Me", which is, wherever you stand on Christianity, infinitely moving.

Emigre West African music and God are pretty high on the agenda in Marrakesh too, whose Malian/Bambara-inspired Gnawa music is presently almost in vogue again, and quite rightly so. Gnawa Halwa's very special *Rhobaoune* (Blanca Li 0B662 CD) is an intimately laid back studio set of utterly engrossing healing, trance and worship music. Sub Rosa's *Moroccon Tronce Music* compilation (SUB CD013-36) has some more extrovert and very West African Gnawa sounds and includes historic recordings made by Paul Bowles. Bowles's own *Black Star At The Point Of Departure* (SUB CDD14-37) includes more of his Moroccan recordings, if you can stand the rather boring piano music. Neither of these discs are particularly new but I've never seen them before.

On The Morket Square Of Morrokesh (Chant Du Monde LDX 274973) again presents good Gnawa material, this time in a grittier 'documentary' format, alongside some snake-charming flute music which actually sounds like it was played by snakes. Slippery and recommended □

Laurie Anderson *Continued from page 28*

Weird stories flow throughout the almost 300 page diary of her life and career that she has written for the (previously avoided) masses to consume. It's as if the mystical Laurie Anderson wants to come clean. Maybe it's the only way she'll get out of Chicago.

There is a common thread in all of this. "It's always the same things: really short stories, really simple, with a slightly weirder angle on the story." She says *Bright Red*, which is her latest musical effort to follow the book, is in the same spirit. "It was a way to talk to people directly without being clever and making it into some big thing, but just to say, 'You know what I'm talking about.' This is what I'm most interested in doing. I think that's why a lot of the record is more personal and less painting a big picture. It's sort of where I am."

The album contains 15 songs, and she says each one was much longer and originally there were 50. "I think it's because of working in this way, doing so much of the music first and thinking I have acres of tape to fill with words, so I can't write fast enough."

Her voice is unnervingly steady. You might check to see if she's using one of her effects but that soothing, robotic cadence is still hers. Her eyes are piercing but friendly and she laughs a lot. We are sitting downstairs in her gigantic loft space. The downstairs has been in the works for a while and is finally near completion. Her studio is impressive and computer boxes still line the floor.

"That's my new Quadra," she says of her newest computer that will help her create visuals for her new show. Will it be the *Bright Red* show? "You know the relationship between the concerts and the records is pretty oblique — so yeah, there's a record out, and a show. What they have to do with each other... they're really not connected."

She's smoking American Spirit cigarettes, except she first decapitates them one by one, putting the filter into the ashtray before smoking it straight. There is a sense of danger and morbidity to Laurie Anderson that sneaks itself in at the oddest and most unexpected times. I remind her that she referred to the writing of one of her songs ("Tightrope") as "like writing her epitaph", and she called the process of writing *Stories From The Nerve Bible* an "obituary". However, she says, "I'm feeling fine, thanks. Not one single suicidal impulse."

With *Bright Red*, Laurie Anderson says she's in her "second adolescence". This album is a little stranger than 1989's *Strange Angels*, where she actually sang more and took a more consonant, she calls it "tuneful", approach. *Bright Red* is distinctly more personal, however, which is rare for her. There seem to be less monsters and druids, just men and women. She says this album is like one big song and the song is about "love and destruction. I think some of the songs are kinda hummable. That's why I put the most challenging song, "Bright Red", second. It's a 'separate the wheat from the chaff' track. If you can get through "Bright Red", then come on in. If not, don't waste your time or your money. This is not the kind of record to appeal to the masses. It is not my attempt to communicate with all. It's also not an attempt to be weird. I think in a way it sounds a lot like me. It really has consistency. It really tells a story, there's not a lot of processing on the vocals."

According to her producer, Brian Eno, the stories she tells need to be heard. Even she was surprised by his allegiance to the content. "I though he'd be putting the mountains and snowstorms and weather related sounds into it. In fact, it was him who kept saying how the most important thing about this is what I'm saying. 'Always make sure that it's right in your face and that it's right out there — don't bury it.' Most records don't say much of anything or repeat a familiar idea, which is not to criticise most records, but their goals are slightly different. The goal of this record is to try to use language slightly differently."

The album's opening track, "Speechless", is a compelling drama between an eagle and a weasel (believe me). The metaphor comes from an Anne Dillard book, but it's really about communication between partners. *"If I could open my mouth, there's so much I would say/Like I can never be honest. Like I'm in it for the thrill/Like I never loved anyone. And I never will."* "When one person really can't talk 'cause the other person is the dominant one, it's a battle to the death: who gets to say things — that's where the power is," she says. "If you can't articulate your feelings and thoughts, you're almost not there. You're at the mercy of whoever else — they can say who you are and define you... I thought that was a particularly bizarre way of approaching that."

The most personal song on the album, also about a relationship, is called "Poison". *"I'll never forget it, we had a fight. Then you turned around/Turned on the light/You left our bed/Then you moved downstairs to live with her instead/Yeah, just one floor and a shout away/I guess I should have moved, but I decided to stay/Did I drink some poison that I don't remember now?"*

The song seems desperately female. It's a pleasant surprise to know that the workaholic art maven has fights with her boyfriends and is envious and human. "It's about jealousy. I don't think particularly from a woman's point of view at all. It's about jealousy and guilt." Writing these songs from personal experience has been "really easy", but she says she wouldn't make a a habit of it. "I feel guilty writing songs like that because there are other people involved and they know exactly who they are."

Currently, Anderson is in the process of putting together an all-female crew for her next show. The show, which she says will be more stripped down, will be yet another example of her new simplified, more direct mindstate. About the all-woman crew, she says, "It's a different kind of working mentality. It doesn't have that aspect of who's bossing who, quite as much. Women are a little bit easier about those things. Also I would really like to get the opportunity to teach a younger woman things. I wish more women did that and the reason they don't is that often women don't give other women a chance to get started, so they scramble up the heaps for themselves and hire a lot of men and proceed to be in the same fucking situation — so I thought that this would be one way to do something different."

About the show itself, she says, "I'm a lot cruder now. I did a big performance last year. It was so complicated, there was so much stuff. I want to get rid of it for this new show."

Although Anderson is part of that downtown New York set who pride themselves on fighting causes, her aspirations are much simpler, and much more personal. Women's issues possess her. "Here's an example. I was reading a book called *The Discoverers*, a two volume book about all the discoveries that have been made. Out of the thousands of photos, there were two pictures of women. I started to sob. I thought, 'What have we been doing?' It's been thousands of years, we must have come up with something... a couple of pots, *something*. Of course, it's taken millions of years for women to get to this point. Any legislation that can be put into effect won't make any difference — it's a spiritual change that it'll take. It will take as long as it took to make it this way to change it. That's probably what I'm the angriest about... every single day I think about this."

And surely she'll be able to make a change, because Laurie Anderson is a woman who can't leave things as they are. The one thing that she has yet to do is make a horror movie. But she'll get there. "I like to scare people. I like to scare myself." □

Bright Red *is released on 29 August on WEA.* Stories From The Nerve Bible *is published by Harper Collins, price £20.*

Lo-fi *Continued from page 32*

Just as UK punk brought the isolated and the marginalised out of the woodwork, so Lo-fi has dredged up some hitherto invisible oddities Guided By Voices probably set the record for the longest stretch missing in action (it took them ten years to release their first record, 1994's *Bee Thousand*), yet even well-known groups like Royal Trux and Sebadoh (whose Lou Barlow is an ex-member of Dinosaur Jr) were recording and releasing albums in 1989 and 1990 when absolutely no one was listening None of these groups would have survived without the platform provided by Lo-fi's informal network contrast the fate of The Electric Eels in 1978, whose music, according to Jon Savage, was as vital as that of The Clash, with that of the currently feted Guided By Voices Both bands were from Ohio, neither were pulled up on the coat-tails of any Ohio scene, yet GBV have survived to be celebrated (their back catalogue is about to be relased for the first time, and they have received favourable notices in *Spin*) where The Electric Eels have vanished without trace Similarly, Grifters are receiving the attention now which it took their fellow Memphis group Big Star a decade or more to achieve (by which time they had long been burnt out)

Perhaps one way to get a handle on Lo-fi's loose-knit sound and scene is to reflect on what might have happened if the disparate, isolated initiatives of 1975-78 had become the bedrock of American punk, if Pere Ubu, Devo and Television hadn't foundered on uncomprehending major labels, but had instead blasted the influential indie trail later bulldozed by the Anglicised, rockist hardcore of Black Flag and Dead Kennedys Certainly, there are uncanny similarities between 1994's groups and those of 1977 the dense guitar interplay of Polvo recalls Television, Six Finger Satellite have been compared to Devo, while the stray sonorities and eruptions of noise that derail songs by Pavement, Royal Trux, Trumans Water and Grifters have affinities with the same electronic disfigurement of rock 'n' roll to be found in Pere Ubu (or Krautrock groups such as Can, Faust and Neu!)

In terms of more recent history, the paradigm Lo-fi records are Rapeman's *Two Nuns And A Pock Mule* (1988) and Slint's *Spiderland* (1991) Both albums invite ecstasies about 'hot' rhythm sections and 'live feel' in the style of Joe Carducci in his book *Rock And The Pop Narcotic* Yet both records also rewrite Carducci's concept of live rock in a far more delicate and jazzed script. Prime influences on this pair, and on Rodan, Six Finger Satellite, Drive Like Jehu and Polvo, are the English post-punk experiments of Wire and Gang Of Four You might say the Lo-fi groups maximise the minimalism of their UK progenitors, so that Gang Of Four's bastardised white funk becomes a fully fledged investigation of top-end guitar harmonics and rhythms, almost always untreated

"It was definitely a conscious decision to lose the effects on the guitar," explains John McLean of Providence's Six Finger Satellite, "as a way of making it a challenge to use no distortion, minimal structures it ends up much more interesting It opens up a lot of space for the bass and the drums A lot of my favourite bands have clean guitar sounds, like Captain Beefheart" Jason Noble of Rodan sneers at "affecting dynamics Most of our sound's just like *amp* There's so much room on a guitar, infinite sounds to be sought One thing about rocking out is that there's an abandon, like solos and the lead singer We try hard not to have a front person That's an element of being a quartet more than a band, and has a lot to do with improvisation and playing off of each other We try to listen to each other, so where it's brand new, we're not sure what the next move is It's not a safe decision to do that."

Virtually all of these groups improvise at least part of the time "When we started doing Improv, we were definitely trying to get into sounds that don't sound like guitar, that you wouldn't associate with guitar," says Kevin of Trumans Water "Regular written songs almost don't have the potential to be really good"

While groups such as Thinking Fellers Union Local 282 and Trumans Water seem to be cueing off the destructured chaos of Japan's The Boredoms, interpreting Improv as sensory overload, other groups see it more as tool than trade "We've always been pretty heavily into improvising," says John McLean of SFS "It's how we write We cut a lot of that stuff into snippets and stuck them between the main songs on *The Pigeon Is The Most Popular Bird*, which was a way of presenting that side of us There are bands with no specific agenda, and we're really tired of that, so we wanted something *musical* to have as an agenda."

As an idea, punk has been very much to the fore in the US in the past few years, mostly due to Riot Grrrl, and it's noticeable how Lo-fi has succeeded in combining elements of 1976 with the supposed ennui of the present, the 'entrepreneurial' DIY ethic of punk with the assumed don't-care attitude of the slacker generation "There isn't so much a message as an aesthetic," says John McLean of SFS "We're conscious that so many people think the big thing for our generation is slacker, the whole idea of not taking a stand, and that's something we've gone out of our way to be apart from, at least musically We're really aware of the fact that in this social sense, somehow you're being supported by a paying scene, that you owe people something"

With lyrics and moods that range from the intensely private nocturnes of Rodan and Slint to the nonsense babble of Trumans Water and Pavement, Lo-fi typifies a bewildered generation coming to terms with both the breakdown of the Great American Jobs Machine and with the senescence of rock music as youth culture (As Jason of Rodan wryly comments, "Half divorced, half not divorced, half went to college, half didn't go Some of us have been dishwashers for years" Indeed, the bands mentioned here are a motley collection of waiters, cooks, delivery boys, social workers, sound engineers and the unemployed.)

Unlike Grunge, however, which in its truest form was a suburban or blue collar phenomenon, Lo-fi at least attempts to respond, even to adapt to this newfound situation The sense of musical experiment, of veering off into such marginal areas as jazz and Improv, is perhaps a sign of acceptance by the participants in this subculture that they will never again be culturally central, yet this doesn't actually matter. Decentred though it may be, Lo-fi still asks awkward questions of those who would assume rock and its attendant milieu to have expired for good As Trumans Water put it in "Aroma Of Gina Arnold" *"They sold our youth was dead/How could they know?"* □

Some records

Slint *Spiderland* (Touch & Go, 1991)
Pavement *Slonted And Enchonted* (Big Cat, 1992)
Polvo *Todoy's Active Lifestyles* (Touch & Go, 1993), *Celebrate The New Dark Age* (Touch & Go, 1994)
Six Finger Satellite *The Pigeon Is The Most Popular Bird* (Sub Pop, 1993)
Trumans Water *Spasm Smash* (Elemental, 1993), *God Speed The Punchline* (Elemental, 1994)
Sebadoh *Bubble & Scrape* (Domino, 1993)
Royal Trux *Cats And Dogs* (Domino, 1993)
Rodan *Rusty* (Quarterstick, 1994)
Grifters *Croppin' You Negotive* (Southern, 1994)
Unwound *New Plastic Ideas* (Kill Rock Stars, 1994)
Drive Like Jehu *Yonk Crime* (Elemental, 1994)
Guided By Voices *Bee Thousand* (Matador, 1994)

letters

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Byrne-ing passion

Many thanks from this side of the Atlantic for your cover feature on David Byrne (*The Wire* 124) It vexes me that someone who obviously enjoys what he does, means what he says, is thoughtful and articulate when asked direct questions, and is willing to share the wealth with less fortunate artists (without a dot of guile or cynicism, fashionable or genuine) could so consistently draw the self-righteous ire of so many fellow musicians and music critics (A recent, grudgingly favourable *Village Voice* review of Byrne's current concert film resorted to a last paragraph scolding him for not having enough women in his backing band)

It was never necessary to 'get' Byrne in order to enjoy his music He seems to me rather like an especially charismatic street performer who captures your attention, no matter how hurried your pace or urgent your destination, every time you pass by him While I found Byrne's 1989 album *Rei Momo* jubilant rather than "heavy handed", I applaud Kim Green for her insight into the life and career of this passionately unusual performer

Richard Harland Smith, New York

Sea change

Congratulations on the recent changes to your magazine, which have added more cohesion to your coverage of the increasingly fragmented processes in contemporary music

In tracking the ricochets from Webern, Stockhausen, Chuck Berry, John Coltrane, James Brown, Kraftwerk, Miles Davis, your magazine provides the only readable account of music as it happens now

More importantly, because most of your contributors seem to be *writers* rather than journalists (ie concerned with personal expression as a primary goal rather than the transformation of external events into strictly measured bulbs of information), you are best able to discuss the nature and purpose of the creative act in late 20th century life

It does an old sailor's heart proud

Jack Silver, HMS Exemplary Life

Frankly, we give a damn

Re Dave Rimmer's review of Ben Watson's *Frank Zappa The Negative Dialectics Of Poodle Play* (*The Wire* 124) Frank Zappa might have been more than occasionally facile, but his supposed "sexism and homophobia" are part of his satirist's 'no one escapes' mentality There is a difference between the identifying and parodying of a stereotype (as on "He's So Gay") and actual homophobia, as practised by televangelists, which hypocrisy Zappa pillories them for on "Broadway The Hard Way" Similarly his 'sexism' is visited on each gender "Bobby Brown", for instance, does for four sexualities in one (fairly crap) song This could explain why Zappa is so disproportionally favoured among the cartooning fraternity (Savage Pencil, Morton/Chuck Death, Matt Groening *et al*)

Oh yes This business of his 'prolific' output 77 albums in just under 30 years Equal to, say, three a year Try eliminating from this equation live reworkings, stuff which is merely another composition with formulaic 'twiddly bits' put in ("Dog Breath Variations", "Son Of Mr Green Genes"), two albums of nothing but guitar solos What price that much-vaunted teeming abundance now?

Elliot Rogers, Cwmbran

. . . no we don't

I have just read Ben Watson's *Frank Zappa The Negative Dialectics Of Poodle Play* and Dave Rimmer's charitable review of it (*The Wire* 124) I found the book turgid and pretentious and lost count of the times Watson's line of logic disappeared up its own fundament It's mystifying to me how Watson managed to secure Zappa's blessing for this project, unless Zappa considered him just another in a long line of entertaining weirdos who showed up in Laurel Canyon over the years

On the other hand, I enjoyed Dave Rimmer's review of the book Does he have any plans of his own for a book on Zappa?

Julian Radford, Uxbridge

competition



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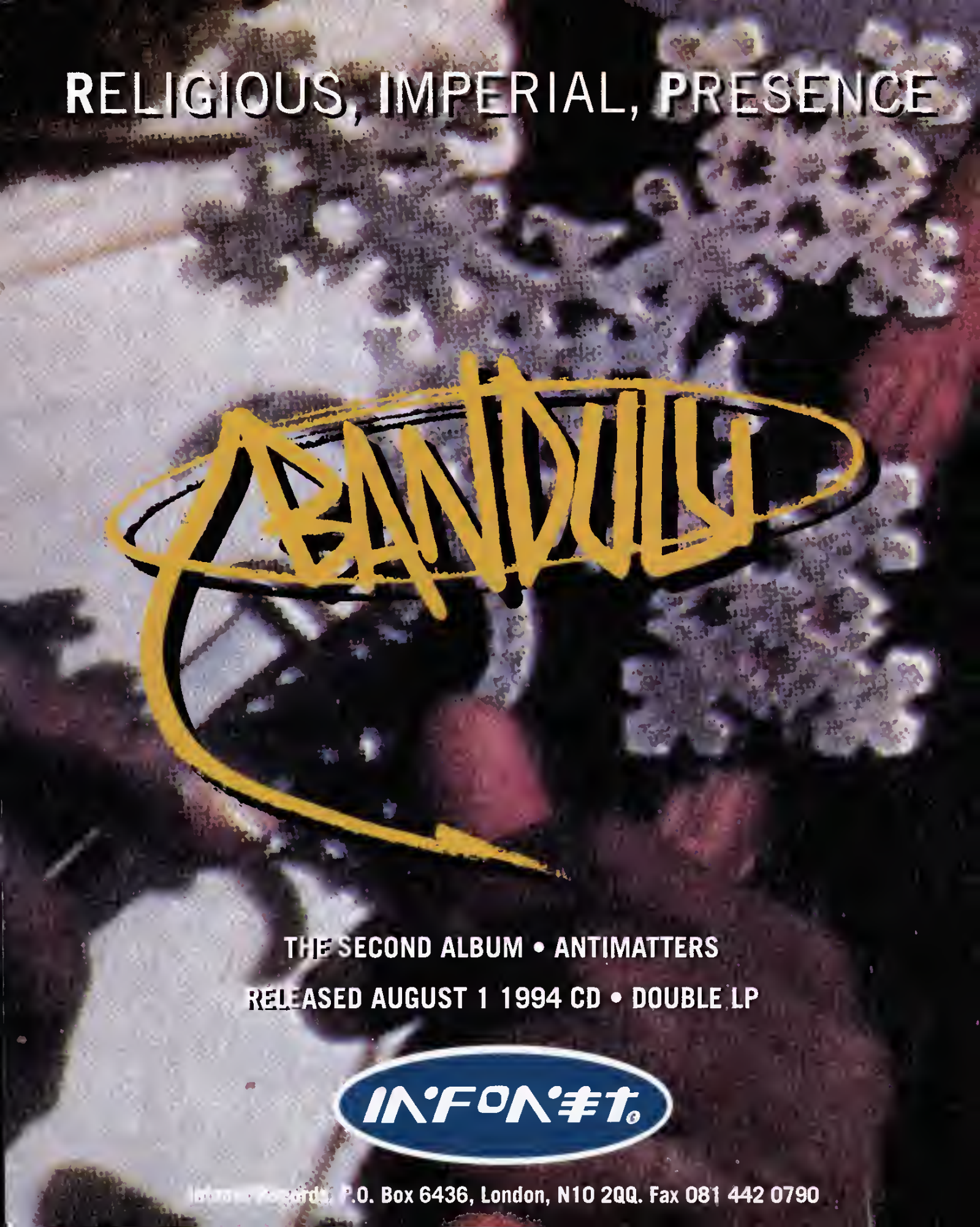
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